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ISLANDS OF SUMMER

BY

ANNE WEALE

All the characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the Author, and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the Author, and all the incidents are pure invention.

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CHAPTER I

"OH, Caroline, I want to have a word with you. Come down to my office before you go to lunch, will you, please?"

The *directrice* passed briskly along the corridor, her immaculate grey hair delicately coloured with the new "Tahitian Twilight" rinse.

Shelagh Curtis, who had overheard this request from inside the stockroom, gave Caroline an enquiring glance.

"Why the summons, I wonder? You haven't been kicking 'Orrible Henri, have you?" she asked, with mock severity.

'Orrible Henri was an unusually bad-tempered white poodle belonging to one of the salon's most important clients. It was not his fault that he was so snappy. He spent his life beneath restaurant tables and in stuffy fitting-rooms, and his digestion had been ruined by too many *petits fours* and soft-centred chocolates. Whenever his mistress came to the Sanchia salon for a massage or a facial, he lay under the treatment couch on a cushion specially reserved for him. Every month he underwent a beauty treatment himself at a poodle parlour, and recently he had suffered the crowning indignity of being tinted pale pink. His newest collar was pale pink suede, with his initial in diamanté.

The thought of anyone daring to kick him made Caroline laugh.

"Not likely – I'd be sacked on the spot," she answered wryly. "Perhaps I've been booked to do a bride."

It was one of the salon's special services to send trained beauty operatives to make up brides for their weddings,

and the girls always looked forward to such assignments because they generally received a particularly generous tip, and enjoyed seeing the beautiful wedding dresses designed by famous *couturiers* and the luxurious interiors of their clients' homes.

However, it was customary for the *directrice* to mention these engagements when she passed through the salon on her daily tour of inspection. A summons to her office usually meant a reproof for some shortcoming.

So it was with a slightly troubled expression that Caroline returned to one of the elegantly appointed white and gold treatment rooms to remove Lady Alistair's toning masque. She could not remember having done anything wrong recently, but some of the clients were so fretful and captious that they would make complaints from sheer pettishness. One twinge when their eyebrows were plucked, or one fingernail shaped to a fraction less than perfection, and some of them would rush to the *directrice* with accusations of gross negligence.

It was a quarter to one when Lady Alistair slipped fifty pence into the pocket of Caroline's pale blue overall, and sailed off to lunch at the Caprice. She was one of the nicest clients; always friendly and cheerful, with a clear fine-pored skin that it was a pleasure to work on.

Caroline tidied the cosmetics trolley with its rows of bottles and jars, and turned down the heat from the radiator so that the room would not be stuffy after lunch. Then she folded the fleecy blue blanket which kept clients warm and relaxed while they were on the white leather treatment couch, disposed of the soiled cleansing tissues, and took the used bandeau and towels to the laundry room.

"Shall I wait for you?" Shelagh asked, when her friend hurried into the staff room for a quick tidy up before presenting herself to the *directrice*.

"No, you go on ahead. I'll follow as soon as I can," said Caroline.

It was the opening day of the winter sales, and the two girls had arranged to spend their lunch hour bargain-hunting in one of the big stores in Regent Street.

"Well, if you can't spot me in the coat department, don't waste time searching the whole shop." Shelagh swallowed the last morsel of a ham roll, and reached for her raincoat. "Good luck with Mrs. T. I hope she doesn't keep you too long."

Mrs. Thackeray's office was on the ground floor of the building, and the door was already open. The *directrice* was sitting at her desk, looking through a large ledger which Caroline knew to contain the operatives' sales sheets.

Oh, dear... my sales must be down, she thought uneasily.

For, as well as giving treatments, all the salon staff were expected to persuade the clients to buy beauty preparations for use at home, and to encourage occasional clients to become regular ones.

This was the only aspect of her job which Caroline disliked. It was not so bad when she was dealing with women whom she knew to be wealthy. But a number of her clients were women for whom a visit to the salon was quite a momentous event, the result of weeks of saving up so that they could look their very best when attending an important business function with their husbands. And with clients of this type, Caroline was always afraid that they might not dare to say "No" if she urged them to buy things, or to book a second appointment.

"Ah, Caroline . . . come in." Mrs. Thackeray glanced up and smiled at her. "Close the door, will you? And sit down . . . I won't be a moment." She continued her study of the ledger.

Like the reception lounge, the hairdressing salon and the treatment rooms, the office had white and gold walls, a thick sapphire carpet and gold velvet draperies. Double-glazed windows shut out the noise of the Bond Street traffic, and filmy white Terylene glass-curtains screened a view of an exclusive furrier's establishment across the road.

Caroline sat in the chair in front of the ornately gilded desk. Near it, in a softly-lit showcase, the most expensive cut-crystal flacons of the Sanchia perfumes were displayed against a fall of sapphire velvet. Every morning the entire salon was sprayed with one of the three exquisite scents. Today, the rooms were redolent of the subtle, slightly musky fragrance of "Tsarina". Tomorrow there would be a piquant aroma of "Diadem". The third of the world-famous perfumes – and Caroline's favourite – was the haunting, elusive "Spring".

On the wall opposite the showcase, in an impressive gilt frame, was a full-length portrait of Madame Sanchia herself. There were copies of the painting in the Sanchia salons in New York and Paris and Rome, and the portrait was often used in advertisement campaigns, and with magazine articles about the extraordinary woman who, from mysterious origins in Central Europe, had built up a vast international beauty empire.

At last Mrs. Thackeray closed the ledger. "Don't look so alarmed, Caroline. I shall think you have a guilty conscience," she said, with an unexpected twinkle.

So it was not a carpeting. Caroline relaxed and smiled.

"I did have a rather difficult session with Mrs. Fitzroy-Vessiter the other day," she admitted candidly.

"Oh, that woman!" Mrs. Thackeray said, with a gesture that dismissed Mrs. Fitzroy-Vessiter as one of the occupational hazards of the beauty business. "Well, I

have no doubt you dealt with her as tactfully as you could. In fact your ability to cope with some of our more trying clients is one of the reasons why you are here." She paused, and gave Caroline a searching look, as if making up her mind about something.

"Now I want to ask you some rather personal questions," she went on, after a moment. "It's very important that you should be absolutely frank with me."

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Thackeray." Caroline was mystified. She could not imagine what all this was leading to.

The *directrice* leaned back in her chair and lightly clasped her slim smooth-skinned hands. Her nails were lacquered with Sanchia "Peony Sheen" to match her lipstick, and there was a large square-cut aquamarine above her platinum wedding ring. She was a widow, probably in her early fifties. Today she was wearing a turquoise Chanel suit over a blouse of paler silk. Caroline thought her the epitome of mature elegance; a living example of the Sanchia maxim that good looks mellowed but need not fade.

"You are not engaged, I believe?"

Caroline shook her head.

"Nor likely to be?"

This time Caroline smiled. "Not unless something very unexpected happens."

Mrs. Thackeray chuckled. "Well, falling in love is apt to be unexpected . . . and sometimes rather inconvenient," she said lightly. Then, her manner becoming serious again: "So it would be true to say that you have no romantic attachments at the moment, and none which might become so in the foreseeable future?"

"Yes, quite true," Caroline agreed.

"You still live at home, I understand. Is there any special reason for that?"

"Not really. I simply prefer it. I could move into London if I wished. My parents wouldn't object," Caroline said reflectively. "But even if I did, I would still go home at weekends. All my interests are there."

"Ah, yes, you're very keen on swimming and sailing, aren't you?" Evidently Mrs. Thackeray had been studying the questionnaire which Caroline had had to fill in when she first applied for a training course at the salon. "Well, that is also in your favour," she murmured, half to herself.

Caroline wished she would come to the point of the interview. She was beginning to suspect that a transfer to another salon was in the offing. But she could not see what her interest in swimming and sailing could have to do with it.

"Did you know that Madame Sanchia was in London at the moment?" Mrs. Thackeray asked, changing the subject.

"Yes, she was mentioned in the paper yesterday morning."

"She is only here for two days on her way to Paris," the *directrice* explained. "As you probably know, she still takes an intense personal interest in every aspect of the business. Even though it is a world-wide organization now, she continues to make all the major policy decisions, and sometimes to deal with quite small matters."

"But she must be very old now, isn't she?" Caroline said wonderingly. She knew that Sanchia cosmetics had been launched just after the First World War, and that their creator could scarcely be the magnificent black-haired beauty who gazed regally down from the oil painting on the office wall.

Mrs. Thackeray swivelled her chair so that she too could admire the flawless ivory complexion and flashing

dark eyes which must have been an excellent advertisement for their owner's first home-made beauty aids.

"Yes, she is old now," she agreed. "Over seventy, I should think – although nobody knows her exact age. That portrait was painted when she was in her prime. Now she never permits any photographs, although she is still remarkably handsome. I expect you'd like to meet her, wouldn't you?"

Caroline was still gazing at the picture, and at the fabulous emerald necklace round the long white throat.

"It would be like an audience with royalty. I should be petrified," she said wryly.

"Not too petrified, I hope. She wants you to have dinner with her tonight."

Caroline gaped at her, dumbfounded.

"M – me?" she stammered, at last.

Mrs. Thackeray smiled at her evident consternation. "There's no need to panic. Madame won't eat you. As a matter of fact she's much less formidable than she sounds."

"But why? – what for?" Caroline exclaimed incredulously.

"Because, as I told you just now, she likes to keep in touch with every aspect of the business. At the moment she wishes to have a talk with one of the girls from this salon, and I've decided to send you along," Mrs. Thackeray said calmly.

"But I can't go . . . I've nothing to wear," Caroline protested.

"What are you wearing under your overall?"

"My yellow jersey dress . . . it's as old as the hills."

"Never mind. Madame Sanchia likes bright colours, and she knows you weren't prepared for this invitation," the *directrice* reassured her.

Caroline bit her lip. "I shall be quaking all afternoon," she murmured distractedly.

"My dear Caroline, it may be something of an ordeal, but it's also a very great honour," Mrs. Thackeray reminded her crisply. "And if you make a good impression, it may result in a wonderful opportunity for you."

"I don't understand . . . ?" Caroline began.

"Well, I'm not really supposed to tell you anything," the older woman said, frowning slightly. "All I will say is that Madame Sanchia intends to make a special appointment from among the London personnel, and that she might – only *might* – choose you. So you see this is not the time to give way to unnecessary nerves. And they are quite unnecessary, I assure you. Madame is an expert at putting people at ease. She's most human and delightful. You'll soon relax once you've met her."

A wonderful opportunity . . . a special appointment . . . make a good impression . . .

Caroline's head was still in a whirl of speculation and apprehension when Shelagh came back from the sale to find her sitting on the radiator in the staff room, abstractedly munching an apple.

"Did you snap up any bargains? Look what I've got! Isn't it the most gorgeous colour for cheering up the rest of the winter?"

Shelagh unwrapped her sales trophy and triumphantly modelled it before she noticed that her friend seemed oddly unimpressed by such a spectacular bargain.

"Don't you like it, Carol? Anyone can see it's a model. My sister always says the only real sales snips are the top fashion things which only last one season. And from twenty-five pounds down to ten! – well, I just couldn't resist it. I say, what's the matter – d'you feel ill?"

"No, I'm fine. I think it's lovely, Shelagh," Caroline said hastily, forcing herself to concentrate on the vivid coral topcoat which undoubtedly was an enviable "snip".

"You haven't been out," Shelagh said sharply, realizing that Caroline's raincoat was dry, while her own was damp all over the shoulders. "Surely Mrs. T. didn't keep you in all lunch-hour? What did she want? Was it a wigging?"

Caroline shook her head. Mrs. Thackeray had asked her not to mention the matter to the other girls. But she felt that she could safely tell Shelagh about it – and how else could she explain not going out, and being in such a dither of nerves?

"Lawks!" Shelagh exclaimed, when she had heard what had happened in her absence. "Well, rather you than me. I should faint with terror. When's the eleventh hour . . . and where's the old girl staying?"

"She's staying at the Lanchester. I've got to be there at half past six because she's going out somewhere at eight," Caroline explained. "Oh, Shelagh, I'm palsied. It wouldn't be so bad if I had a decent dress to wear. But this terrible old yellow thing –"

"The dress is fine. It suits you," Shelagh said cheerfully. "But you certainly can't skulk into the Lanchester in that scruffy old mac. You must borrow my new coat and sweep in grandly."

"Can I really? You are an angel," Caroline said gratefully. "Frankly, my morale will need all the boost it can get." She thought of something and groaned. "Oh, damn, I've just remembered. My last appointment is with old Mrs. Eustace, and you know what *she* is! Just pray she doesn't keep me late today."

It was ten minutes to five – twenty minutes past the time of her appointment – when Mrs. Eustace arrived. She was an agreeable old lady, the widow of a very rich tailoring magnate. Caroline felt sorry for her because her life was so luxurious, yet so empty. She had no children and grandchildren to interest her, and she lived in a gloomy old mansion which was full of valuable antiques and *objets d'art* and about as homely as a museum. Her only pleasure in life seemed to be in giving and attending an endless succession of cocktail parties. She fancied herself as a patron of the arts and was always discovering and helping to launch some brilliant unknown artist or musician. Somehow none of these budding geniuses ever seemed to come to full flower, and Caroline suspected most of them of being money-grubbing charlatans. But whatever disillusionments she had suffered, Mrs. Eustace continued to be fervently convinced of the brilliance of her current protégé.

This afternoon, she was gushing with enthusiasm for a young poet who was going to read some of his work at the party she was attending. She was booked to have the salon's "Gala Occasion" treatment which normally took seventy-five minutes. But it was very difficult to keep the treatment to time when she would keep shifting about and chatting.

And, as the hands of her watch crept nearer and nearer to closing time, Caroline couldn't help biting her lips with impatience and wondering why wealthy old ladies wasted so much time and money in vain efforts to recapture the allures of youth.

It was ten minutes past six, and the upper floor was deserted, when Caroline finally escorted Mrs. Eustace down to the reception desk where she then became interested in some gift caskets.

Caroline left the glassy-eyed receptionist to cope with her, and fled back upstairs. She had twenty minutes in which to wash, do her face and get to the Lanchester. She would never make it. However, by a stroke of luck, there was an empty taxi going by when she left the building, and so she arrived at the hotel at precisely twenty-nine minutes past six.

Caroline had read about the penthouse suites at the Lanchester. Four leading interior decorators had been commissioned to devise a décor, and each had striven to excel his rival in originality and luxury. One suite had a bath in the shape of a mother-of-pearl swan; another had a glass-sheltered patio with fountains and sunken lily pools.

After being taken up in the special penthouse lift, Caroline was admitted to Madame Sanchia's suite by an elderly uniformed maid. But as she took off her coat and was shown into a large softly lit sitting-room, she was in no state to notice that the walls were hung with lustrous peacock Thai silk or that there were two polar bear skins on the floor. She had never been so nervous in her life.

Madame Sanchia was seated at one end of a long velvet-covered couch. She was wearing a high-necked, long-sleeved dinner dress of midnight blue chiffon, with a huge fireburst of rubies pinned close to her throat, and bracelets of rubies encircling her frail wrists. Her hair – white now, but still thick and silky – was swept back from her forehead and temples and coiled high on the crown of her head, just as she had worn it in the famous portrait. She did not lean against the cushions behind her, but sat regally erect, her hands folded in her lap, her dark heavy-lidded eyes critically appraising her guest. She looked, thought Caroline, like an empress from another century. Great age, having ravaged her beauty, had invested her with formidable authority and dignity.

"You are three minutes late, Miss Browning." Her voice — unexpectedly deep, and slightly accented — was curt with displeasure.

"I'm sorry, Madame. You see —"

"No excuses, please. Now that you are here, be so good as to attend to the sherry." One thin white hand, the fingers glittering with rings, made an imperious gesture towards a table set with various bottles and cut glass decanters. "No, no, that is whisky, silly girl. The sherry is to your left."

Caroline's hands were so unsteady that it was a miracle she did not upset or break anything. However, she managed the task without a disaster, and was then bidden to join her hostess on the sofa.

Presently, after another nerve-racking scrutiny, Madame Sanchia said, "Let me see your hands, please."

While her hands were being examined, Caroline noticed that Madame's own nails, although expertly manicured, had the vertical lines which often indicated a rheumatic tendency.

"Yes, you have good hands," Madame said, releasing them. "And, according to Mrs. Thackeray, you are very competent. Do you feel yourself to be competent, Miss Browning?"

Caroline was not sure how to answer. "I don't know . . . I hope so, Madame."

Oh, lord, now she'll decide I haven't any confidence in myself, she thought, immediately regretting the lameness of her answer.

But whatever Madame thought, her expression remained enigmatic. And for the next ten minutes Caroline had the unnerving experience of being relentlessly catechized, and of feeling that each of her replies was more inept than the one before.

She was relieved when the maid announced dinner, and they moved into the adjoining dining-room. Here the walls were hung with an unusual *trompe l'oeil* of pastoral vistas, with an imitation balustrade all round the lower part of the room, and columns at each corner. The effect was an extraordinarily realistic impression of an airy gazebo set in the middle of an eighteenth-century garden, and it was so charming and unexpected that Caroline momentarily forgot her nervousness and said, "Oh, how pretty! What a clever idea." And then she caught Madame Sanchia's eye, and was afraid she might have sounded gushing, and that, whatever the "wonderful opportunity" might be, it would certainly not be offered to her now.

However, during dinner Madame refrained from asking her any more searchingly personal questions, and launched upon various general topics so that Caroline no longer felt like a specimen under a microscope.

Towards the end of the meal, when they had been discussing recent fashion trends – and Caroline had made the surprising discovery that she was no longer on edge, and even quite enjoying herself – Madame abruptly changed the subject.

"Tell me, Miss Browning, what do you know about Bermuda?" she asked suddenly.

"Well . . . not a great deal, I'm afraid," Caroline said, rather blankly. "Some of the clients at the salon have mentioned spending holidays there, and I gather it's very beautiful . . . wonderful beaches and flowers and so on."

"But rather remote from your world, you feel?" Madame suggested, smiling faintly.

"As remote as the moon, unfortunately," Caroline said dryly.

"Ah, but the moon is less remote than it used to be."

Madame rose from her chair. "We'll have coffee in the sitting-room."

"Yes, Madame." Caroline followed her back to the other room.

Well, even if I haven't passed muster, at least I've had dinner with her – and she is rather fabulous, she thought.

"And now I think it's time I explained why I wished to see you," Madame said briskly, as she seated herself on the sofa once more. "No doubt you know that I have had an excellent report of you from Mrs. Thackeray, but in this instance I wanted to judge for myself. I like you, Miss Browning. You're young, and not entirely sure of yourself – but that is better than being brash, as the Americans put it. And you have nice manners, and a pleasant voice and, I suspect, a good deal of common sense. So if you care to accept it, I am offering you a new position – that of junior beauty consultant in our newest salon at the Tropicana Hotel in Bermuda."

When Caroline reached home that night, she found her parents and her brother and sister-in-law watching a play on television. So, although she was bubbling with excitement and longing to pour out her news, she did not disturb them, but went to the kitchen to make coffee.

Sometimes, listening to the other girls at the salon, Caroline felt that she must be exceptionally lucky to be part of such a close-knit and happy family. Even during their teens, none of the four young Brownings had gone through the seemingly commonplace phase of resenting their parents' authority and regarding them as a couple of old-fashioned fuddy-duddies.

"But doesn't your mother want to *know* everything?" someone had once asked Caroline, after expressing astonishment that she had no desire to leave home and share a

flat with her contemporaries.

"I haven't noticed it. Usually she wants to tell me something," Caroline had said laughingly.

And perhaps that was the secret of the Brownings' compatibility. They each had an absorbing interest outside the family circle, and so they were all too busy to be troubled by the tensions and petty clashes which seemed to disrupt some families.

Mr. Browning was a solicitor by profession, and a gardener by inclination. Fortunately his large and rather ugly Edwardian villa had nearly an acre of garden surrounding it; and also an ornate Gothic conservatory, built on to the south wall at the back of the house, which enabled him to grow various exotics.

Mrs. Browning was a collector, and the house was full of her *objets trouvés*. She was also a clever needlewoman, and could run up an evening dress for Caroline or re-upholster a capitonné sofa with equal skill. And her pastime was both pleasurable and profitable. More than once, attending a country house sale, she had spotted some treasure which had escaped the notice of the dealers, and had re-sold it at substantial profit.

Of the three Browning boys, only sixteen-year-old Joey still lived at home all year round.

Rob, who at twenty-two was exactly a year older than Caroline, was away at university most of the time; and David, the eldest, was married and normally lived in a flat in central London.

At the moment he and his wife were staying with the Brownings awaiting the imminent arrival of their first-born. As Clare – a dark-haired, gentle girl, with no close relatives of her own – had not wanted to go into hospital, and as the top-floor flat was not an ideal place for a confinement, Mrs. Browning had hesitantly suggested that

she would be very welcome to have the baby at her house. And it spoke volumes for her handling of the tricky mother-and-daughter-in-law relationship that Clare had accepted the offer with alacrity.

While Caroline was making coffee in the kitchen, Joey and Rob came in from the garage. They were both mad about boats, and had been spending the Christmas vacation building a twelve-foot dinghy to replace the outgrown *Cadet* in which they had first learnt to sail. So they were the first to hear Caroline's news.

"Good lord, you lucky beggar! Think of the sailing!" — was Rob's immediate reaction.

"And water-skiing and skin-diving, too," said Joey enviously. "Have you told Mum and Dad?"

When Caroline shook her head, he dashed across the hall and burst into the sitting-room. "I say, come and hear about Carol! She's going to Bermuda!"

As the play had finished by then, they all came crowding into the kitchen, firing questions at her. And by the time she had told the story from the beginning, the coffee had gone cold and a fresh pot had to be made.

"Oh, Caroline, how lovely for you. Congratulations, darling. It shows how highly they must think of you," Mrs. Browning said delightedly, when they had heard all about the summons to see Madame Sanchia and the wonders of the penthouse suite.

"Yes, well done, old thing. You must be brighter than we realized," David added, with brotherly raillery.

"When do you go?" Clare asked her.

"Oh, not for eight weeks yet. I shan't miss *your* big event," Caroline said affectionately. She had grown very fond of her sister-in-law, and would have been quite upset if going to Bermuda had meant leaving before the arrival of her nephew or niece.

"How long will you be away, dear?" her father asked presently.

"Well, I shall have to sign a contract to stay a minimum of six months. Otherwise it wouldn't be worth the expense of flying me out there," Caroline explained.

Later, when she was getting ready for bed, her mother tapped at the door. "Can I come in and gossip? I'm much too excited to sleep yet."

"Me too. I can still hardly believe it." Caroline finished brushing her fair hair and fastened it into two bunches with rubber bands. She hated sleeping in rollers, and only did so the night after her weekly shampoo. But luckily, although it was not curly, it held a set well, and sometimes she wore it in a casual long bob, and sometimes pinned up in a pleat.

"You'll need a lot of new clothes, darling," her mother said, beginning to look on the practical side. "Last year was such a miserable one that you hardly bought anything. Perhaps tomorrow at lunch-time you could go and choose some patterns. As soon as the sales are finished, the new season's fabrics will start coming into the shops, but eight weeks doesn't give us much leeway. I must make a note to have the sewing machine serviced. It's been a bit crotchety lately."

"Oh, Mother, you won't have time to make me a whole batch of clothes. The baby should be here next weekend and then you'll be run off your feet."

"Only until Clare is on *her* feet. Then they'll all be going back to the flat. Of course I shall make you some clothes," Mrs. Browning said firmly. "And apart from the things I run up, you must have one or two good bought dresses for special occasions. Daddy will help with those. I know you put most of your savings into the kitty for the new boat."

"And now I shan't be here to see it launched," Caroline said disappointedly. "You must get the boys to take some photographs, Mother. And you will let me know all the news?"

"Of course — I shall write every week. But I'm sure your letters will be much more exciting than ours," Mrs. Browning said, smiling. "I expect you'll have a wonderful time . . . lots of beach parties and dances . . . and all that heavenly sunshine. Yes, I know you'll be working all day — but you're sure to have fun at weekends. Perhaps you'll meet some nice young man who'll let you crew for him."

"And who'll then fall madly in love with me and turn out to be a millionaire in disguise," Caroline tacked on, laughing. "Oh, Mother, what an incurable romantic you are! But I should think most of the men in Bermuda are much-married American tourists, all well over fifty. It's not a young people's place. It's too expensive getting there." Her expression clouded a little. "How awful if I don't like it . . . if I'm homesick."

"Oh, nonsense, of course you won't be homesick. You know how you love the sea. You'll be in your element," Mrs. Browning said reassuringly.

Eight weeks later, on a cold wet Sunday afternoon in early March, Caroline said goodbye to her parents at Heathrow, and set out on her great adventure.

Never having flown before, she was inwardly rather nervous as the stewardess showed her to her seat in the tourist section of the airliner. And the knowledge that it would be at least six months before she saw any of her family again, and that for the first time in her life she was completely on her own, made her feel even more apprehensive.

"Would you sit here, please, sir."

The stewardess showed a tall fair-headed young man to the seat next to Caroline.

"Good afternoon," he said pleasantly, taking off his raincoat and bundling it carelessly on to the bag rack.

"Good afternoon." Caroline turned her head to look out at the bleak rainswept runway. She hoped he had not noticed the forlorn expression on her face.

When they were airborne, and had unfastened their seat belts, the young man said, "As we've quite a long flight ahead of us, shall we introduce ourselves? My name is Dryden . . . Colin Dryden."

By this time, Caroline had pulled herself together. She smiled. "I'm Caroline Browning. How do you do?"

"Do you smoke, Miss Browning? No? . . . do you mind if I do?"

Since he appeared to be about the same age as herself, Caroline was faintly surprised to notice that both his lighter and cigarette case appeared to be made of real gold. The case had an inscription inside the lid.

"What a filthy day," he said, after lighting up. "Never mind: a few more hours and we'll be basking in the sun again, thank God."

"Again? Have you been to Bermuda before?" Caroline asked.

He was very good-looking, she thought. A bit of a dandy perhaps, with his narrow suede tie and elastic-sided boots, but definitely not a weedy one.

"I live there," he said, with a grin. "That's why I find English weather so depressing. At home it hardly ever rains for more than an hour or so. You're going for a holiday, I imagine?"

"Heavens, no! I'm going to work there . . . in a beauty salon," she explained.

Having grown up in a predominantly masculine household, with her brothers' friends always about, Caroline had never suffered from shyness of the opposite sex. So, by the time afternoon tea had been served, she and Colin were chatting as easily as if they had known each other for some time.

"What luck to meet someone who can answer all my questions," she said, as the stewardess removed their tea trays.

"What luck to meet someone so pretty." Colin returned mischievously.

But Caroline had already decided that he was the type to flirt outrageously with any passable girl who crossed his path, so she only laughed and went on asking him about the colony.

When Colin learned that she was interested in sailing, he immediately offered to take her out in his own boat, and even went so far as to suggest that they should make a date for the following evening.

But Caroline thought this was going too fast, particularly as it was bound to take her some days to settle down in her new surroundings.

"It's very nice of you, but I don't think I ought to make any plans for my first week. Perhaps later on . . ." she suggested.

The airliner had left London at five o'clock and the flight across the Atlantic took seven hours. So by the time they reached their destination, Caroline's watch showed half past eleven at night and she was feeling very sleepy.

But, as Colin pointed out, Bermuda time was four hours behind British time. So it was actually only half past seven when she stepped out of the plane and found herself transported into a mild spring evening.

Caroline had been told that she would be met by the

senior beauty consultant, Miss Arnold, an American.

But there did not seem to be anyone waiting for her when she emerged from the Customs hall, still accompanied by Colin Dryden.

"Ah, there's my transport." He indicated a white sports car parked in front of the airport building. As he spoke, the man at the wheel got out and came striding towards them.

"Hello, Ian. How are you?" Colin shook the older man's hand, and then turned to introduce Caroline. "My cousin, Ian Dryden. Ian . . . meet Caroline Browning."

If Colin had not mentioned their relationship, she would certainly never have guessed it, Caroline thought. She had never seen two men whose looks were so strikingly contrasted. Colin was fair and Nordic-looking; his cousin was as dark as a gypsy.

"Look, we can't leave you here on your own. Can we give you a lift?" Colin asked, when his cousin had bowed, and murmured a cool "How do you do."

"Oh, no, thank you very much – I think I ought to wait a few minutes." Caroline smiled, but all at once she was conscious of a certain tension, a tiny prickle of discomfiture. And it had something to do with the black-haired dark-eyed cousin, and the way he had scrutinized her.

"But supposing no one turns up? It seems very odd . . . everyone knows the times of the London planes," Colin persisted concernedly. "Anyway, where are you staying? I haven't got your address."

Before Caroline could answer, Ian Dryden said briskly, "I don't want to rush you, Colin, but it's nearly eight o'clock and the family are waiting dinner for us." And then he glanced at Caroline, and added smoothly, "There are plenty of taxis, Miss Browning, if your friends don't seem to be coming."

It was such a pointed snub — yet delivered in such a bland manner — that Caroline felt her cheeks growing hot with anger. However, she did her best not to show it.

“Well, goodbye, Colin. There may be a message at the desk for me. I’ll go and see,” she said quickly.

Pretending not to notice his embarrassment, and with a polite nod to his cousin, she walked away.

She was making enquiries at the airport’s reception counter, when a tall brunette came hurrying up and said rather breathlessly, “Excuse me, but are you Miss Browning? Oh, I am so sorry to keep you waiting. My stupid watch must be slow. I do beg your pardon.”

“It doesn’t matter. Are you Miss Arnold?” Caroline held out her hand.

“Yes, I am . . . Eve Arnold. Glad to know you. Now let’s pick up your baggage. I’ve got a cab waiting. I’m sure you must be longing to freshen up and relax. It’s a long trip from London.”

Caroline had assumed that the senior beauty consultant would be a person much older than herself; someone like Mrs. Thackeray. But Eve Arnold was not more than thirty, perhaps not that.

Tall and slender and blue-eyed, she was not a pretty woman, but she was extremely attractive. She was dressed very simply in a pleated navy skirt and a blue-and-white striped shirt, with a broad black patent belt cinching her waist. Her hair, teeth and nails shone with cleanliness. One knew at a glance that her underwear would be as fresh and immaculate as her outer clothes; that there would be a spotless handkerchief and clean comb in her bag; and that her wardrobe and drawers would always be pin-neat. Caroline liked her on sight, and knew it was going to be fun working with her.

One of the first things she wanted to know was if the

salon staff actually lived in the Tropicana Hotel.

"No, not in the hotel itself," Eve told her. "We have lunch and dinner there – but not in the main dining-room – and we sleep and have breakfast in our cabins. They're what I guess you'd call bungalows in the grounds. There are quite a few of them dotted about the place. The entertainment director has one, and so does Jake, the resident skin-diving instructor. He's British too, by the way, and rather a mystery man. But all the other staff – the waiters and desk-clerks and so on – are local people."

The drive to the Tropicana took about forty-five minutes, and when Caroline first caught sight of the hotel she drew in a breath of wonder. It was built on a hillside, a great white building like a palace. In the soft spring dusk almost every window was alight.

"Pretty impressive, eh?" Eve Arnold commented. "But wait till you see the other side with the cocktail terraces and the gardens going down to the beach. Believe me, this place is about as luxurious as they come – and strictly for the upper income bracket."

The grounds of the hotel were enclosed by a high stone wall, and as they passed through a wide gateway Eve leaned forward and instructed the driver to take a turning off the main drive. A few minutes later, they drew up outside a low building with white-painted shutters beside the windows, and six doors opening on to a long verandah.

"Here we are. Your cabin is next to mine." Eve jumped out of the taxi, and led the way. "The verandah is our lounge," she explained, with a gesture at the comfortable wicker chairs and low coffee tables arranged along its length.

And then she unlocked one of the doors, and ushered Caroline into a small but attractively furnished bedroom.

"As you see we each have our own shower," she said,

opening an inner door, and giving Caroline a glimpse of it. "And there's plenty of closet space, too," she said, pointing to a large built-in wardrobe.

At this point, the coffee-coloured Bermudian taxi driver came in with Caroline's two suitcases. Eve thanked and tipped him, and then she said, "Now I'll just show you the rest of the place, and then I guess you'd like to fall into bed. Incidentally, you know there are three of us, do you?"

Caroline nodded. "I was told that a girl from the Paris salon was coming over. Has she arrived yet?"

"Yes, she got in on Friday. I've been here two weeks, checking the equipment and stock and getting the feel of the place. Marie-Laure is in town this evening. She wanted to come and meet you, but I asked her to wait until tomorrow. I knew she'd want to inspect all your clothes and talk your head off, and I thought you'd prefer to be quiet tonight."

"Yes, I do feel rather dopey. It's after midnight by British time, and as you can imagine I was too excited to sleep well last night," Caroline said ruefully.

The rest of the accommodation consisted of a tiny kitchenette in which to make breakfast and any other light meals they required, a small laundry room where they could hang wet swimsuits and washing, and a store-room for suitcases and oddments.

"Those are all Marie-Laure's," Eve said amusedly, waving at a stack of matched luggage. "That girl has enough outfits to keep her going for five years. I hate to think what she must have paid in excess baggage."

Caroline was so tired that she decided to leave her unpacking until the morning. But she did have a quick refreshing shower.

She had climbed into bed, when Eve tapped at the door

and came in with a glass of warm milk, and the offer of a mild sedative.

"I know you're tired, but sometimes it's hard to drop off in a strange bed. By the way, we don't open shop until ten, so there's no mad rush in the morning. It's been so warm this past week that I've been taking a pre-breakfast dip. I'll give you a call about half past seven . . . okay? Goodnight, Caroline. Sleep well."

"Goodnight. Thank you for the milk."

After she had gone, Caroline finished it up and put the glass on the locker. For a moment she sat looking round the pleasant little room with its gay chintz curtains and bright rugs.

Then she switched off the bedside lamp, and lay down on the well-sprung divan, enjoying the smooth feel of the clean sheets and the softness of the foam rubber pillow.

Seconds later she was asleep.

She was woken next morning by the sound of laughter from somewhere further along the verandah. And as she stretched and yawned, blinking in the sunlight that filled the room, she heard quick light footsteps approaching. Then the door opened.

"Oh, *excusez-moi!* . . . if I had known you were awake I would have knocked. I am Marie-Laure Gautier. I have brought you some coffee."

Later, over breakfast, Caroline discovered that Marie-Laure was three years older than herself; and of course she could not have been as young as Caroline first thought her, because Sanchia did not take girls under eighteen, and it was two years before they became qualified beauty operatives.

But, at first sight, the dark-eyed, olive-skinned French girl looked no more than eighteen or nineteen. Much smal-

ler than either Caroline or Eve, but perfectly proportioned for her height, she was wearing a loose white Terry beach coat and scarlet espadrilles. And when she handed over the coffee and perched on the end of the bed, Caroline saw that under the coat was the briefest of brief red bikinis.

"Oh, have you been swimming? I wish you'd woke me earlier. I'd have come with you," she said.

Eve, coming in at the door, overheard this remark and laughed. "Marie-Laure doesn't swim — she decorates the beach," she said teasingly. "Did you have a good night, Caroline? What would you like for breakfast? Some eggs, or just fruit juice and toast?"

They had breakfast on the sunny verandah, and afterwards Eve and Marie-Laure helped Caroline with her unpacking.

"So it is true that English girls are very *chic* now," Marie-Laure said approvingly, when she had inspected Caroline's wardrobe. "I like this blue chiffon. What a pity we are not the same size, then we could exchange sometimes."

"Come on, girls, it's time we were dressed," said Eve, glancing at her watch.

On the way over to the hotel, she explained to Caroline that the new Sanchia salon adjoined an existing hairdressing salon so that the women staying at the Tropicana could now have "the full glamour treatment", as she put it. The receptionist in the hair salon would also act for the Sanchia department, and had already taken a number of advance bookings.

So, soon after ten o'clock, Caroline ushered her first client into a white-and-gold treatment room very similar to the one she had used in Bond Street.

About twelve o'clock, while she was tidying up after a

second client, Eve looked in.

"How is it going? Everything running smoothly?"

"Very smoothly." Caroline grinned, and fished in the pocket of her overall to show the two generous tips she had been given. "And I sold a bottle of 'Diadem', and booked Mrs. Gilbert for a body massage," she added, pleased with her morning's work.

"Good for you. Listen, I nearly forgot, the staff manager wants to see you. His name is Newbolt, and his office is just across the entrance hall."

"Why does he want to see me?" Caroline asked, starting to unbutton her overall.

"Oh, just to have a look at you, and to recite his party piece about the Tropicana being the finest hotel in Bermuda and how we must all exert ourselves to maintain its high reputation. It's purely a formality. He won't keep you five minutes," Eve explained. "By the time he's through with you, I'll have finished off my client. Then we can all go to lunch."

Beneath her overall, Caroline was wearing a sleeveless mimosa linen shift dress with a skein of small white beads at the neck. After running a comb through her hair, she retouched her lipstick, and changed her low-heeled working shoes for a new pair of white kid sandals.

The hotel's spacious entrance hall was full of people coming in from a morning on the beach, or buying magazines and cigarettes, or making enquiries at the porters' desk. As Caroline had foreseen, the majority of them were people of middle age and over. But there were some children about, and a number of glamorous young things accompanied by men old enough to be their fathers, if not their grandfathers.

On the other side of the hall from the salon, there was a door marked "Private" flanked by two lighted show-

cases. One contained a display of Orrefors crystal, the other Wedgwood china.

Having knocked and been bidden to enter, Caroline found herself in a small ante-room where a girl was busy typing. Two inner doors were marked "Manager" and "Staff Manager".

"I'm Caroline Browning from the Sanchia salon. I believe Mr. Newbolt wants to see me," Caroline said, as the girl looked up enquiringly.

"Oh, yes. Will you take a seat, please." The girl flipped a key on an intercom and said, "Can you see Miss Browning now, Mr. Newbolt?" Then, to Caroline: "Will you go in, please, Miss Browning."

The staff manager was a short, neat, spectacled man in his forties, wearing an American-cut suit, a spotted bow-tie and an air of extreme punctiliousness. He shook Caroline's hand, invited her to sit down and expressed the hope that she had had a pleasant journey and had found her accommodation comfortable. His voice was a curious blend of English and American, and Caroline decided he was probably a Bermudian.

While he was in the middle of what Eve had called his "party piece", a connecting door opened and another man came into the room.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were engaged, George." The newcomer paused on the threshold, and was about to withdraw when he caught Caroline's eye and checked. And then he lifted one dark eyebrow and a quirk of unmistakable amusement flickered at the corner of his mouth.

For the man who had interrupted them was the man who had been so abominably and unjustifiably rude to her the night before at the airport – Colin's cousin, Ian Dryden.

"This is one of the young ladies who are staffing the beauty salon, Mr. Dryden," Mr. Newbolt explained. "Miss Browning is the London representative of Sanchia."

"I see. How do you do, Miss Browning." As coolly as if he had never laid eyes on her before, Mr. Dryden advanced into the room and offered his hand.

It would have given Caroline a great deal of pleasure to have ignored it. But after a momentary hesitation, she extended her own hand, although she did not rise to her feet as Mr. Newbolt obviously expected her to do.

"How do you do," she said stiffly. And as quickly as she could she withdrew her hand from his clasp.

Apparently Mr. Dryden had either met or seen the other two girls as, leaning against the edge of Mr. Newbolt's desk, he said, "You appear to be rather younger than your colleagues, Miss Browning."

"Yes, I am the junior operative," she answered evenly. "But I'm fully qualified. I wouldn't have been sent here if I was not."

Ian Dryden's dark eyes swept appraisingly over her dress and down to her sandals. It was not an offensive look. It was too impersonal to be that. Nevertheless it made Caroline bristle, and she felt her colour coming up.

"Miss Browning is twenty-one, Mr. Dryden," the assistant manager put in, after quickly referring to a file on his desk pad.

"Hm . . . rather young for an overseas assignment, I should have thought. Still, I suppose Miss Arnold will keep an eye on you. Have you cabled your family that you arrived safely, Miss Browning?"

In fact it had been Caroline's intention to do this during her lunch break. But, furious at his tone and by the reference to Eve keeping an eye on her, she said frigidly,

"I hardly think that's necessary. I shall write to them during the week."

"Well, I think it is necessary. So see to it right away, will you?" His tone was pleasant, even casual, but she knew that it was an order – and one she had better obey, or there would be trouble.

And with that, he strolled out of the office.

"I gather Mr. Dryden is the manager," she said, after he had closed the door behind him.

"Well, yes . . . that is the title he uses," Mr. Newbolt agreed. "But as the Tropicana is owned by the Dryden family, it's rather a misleading designation. Now as I was saying . . ."

At four o'clock that afternoon, Eve told Caroline that she could have the rest of the day free.

"You need a breathing space," she said kindly. "Why not go down to the beach and have a swim?"

"The hotel beach? Is that allowed?"

"Sure . . . why not? I'll be down there myself in an hour or so. Today's been pretty slack, but tomorrow we're all booked till seven."

So Caroline went back to the cabins and changed into a trim blue one-piece swimsuit with a matching tabard and beach-bag. Since it was only twenty-four hours since she had been muffled in a thick travelling coat, it seemed very odd to be strolling out of doors with bare legs.

It took her some time to find her way to the beach, for the hotel gardens were intersected by many winding paths, and it was quite easy to lose one's way among the luxuriant shrubberies and groves of semi-tropical trees. But presently, arriving at the top of a flight of stone steps, she drew in a breath of delight. Below her, curved like a crescent moon, was the hotel's private beach, its silvery

sand dotted with gay umbrellas and lounging mattresses. And beyond it, fringed with little foaming wavelets, and shading from pale translucent turquoise to deep sapphire blue, was the sea.

Caroline ran down the steps and across the soft sand till she was near the water's edge. Then, quickly unbuttoning her tabard, she tossed it over a vacant deck chair and rummaged in her bag for her bathing cap.

Seconds later, she was wading thigh-deep in the water. And when she was up to her waist, she threw up her arms and plunged forward.

About half an hour later, after one of the best bathes of her life, she returned to the beach with such a marvelous sense of physical well-being that out of sheer exuberance she ran up the sand and did a handstand.

After she had done it, she felt a little foolish, but fortunately there were not many people about to have noticed her. Most of them had gone in to change for the cocktail hour, she supposed.

And then, after she had pulled off her cap and was drying her face and wishing she had something to eat, a voice said, "My word, you certainly can swim. That's one of the neatest crawls I've seen in a long time."

Caroline gave a little jump, and slowly lowered the towel.

"Well . . . thank you," she said rather breathlessly.

For the stranger standing a couple of yards away from her, his hands on his hips, a beach towel slung over his shoulder, was one of the most attractive men she had ever seen.

CHAPTER II

"YOU'RE English. So am I."

With a single easy movement he dropped on to the sand, and sat facing her, his powerful sunburned arms looped loosely round his updrawn knees. "The Tropicana doesn't have many English guests. It caters mainly for Americans."

Caroline rubbed the towel lightly over her arms and legs. "I'm not a guest. I work here."

"Do you indeed? Then it's 'snap' again."

"Really?" Caroline was surprised. Somehow he did not look like a man who worked in a hotel.

They studied each other for a moment; the man openly admiring her slender figure and pretty legs, and Caroline wondering why she was so instantaneously drawn to him.

As far as she could judge, he was somewhere in his late twenties. His hair was straw-coloured, his eyes blue, and his nose very slightly bent, as if he had walked into a door, or someone's fist, and the cartilage had never quite recovered. The total impression was one of enormous vitality and charm combined with a slight raffish air.

"Don't tell me they've decided to appoint a female life-guard?" The man grinned at her, showing a set of fine white teeth.

Caroline laughed, and shook her head.

I like him, she thought. He's nice. It's going to be fun knowing him.

"Well, I'd willingly go out of my depth if you would rescue me." He leaned back on one elbow to feel in the pocket of his shorts. "Are you hungry after swimming?"

Have some chocolate." He snapped a bar in half, and tossed one on to her lap.

"Thank you. As a matter of fact I'm starving. It must be the Bermuda air. I ought to have brought some sandwiches." She leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs, wishing they were not so wintry pale. Never mind: it shouldn't take long to acquire a tan.

"You still haven't told me who you are," the man reminded her.

"Caroline Browning. I work in the new beauty salon next to the hairdresser's. Who are you?"

"Jacob Macauley . . . but I'm usually called Jake."

"Oh, yes, you teach skin-diving," Caroline interjected, and remembered that Eve had called him "rather a mystery man".

"Who told you that?" he asked curiously.

"Eve Arnold, our senior consultant."

"I see. So there are three of you – a long-stemmed American beauty, a French 'sex kitten' and . . ."

He paused, and Caroline waited for him to decide on a description for her.

". . . and an English Water Baby."

The allusion to her youth touched a raw spot. She wondered if Ian Dryden had checked that she had sent the cable.

"That's something I'd like to try – skin-diving, I mean," she said. "But I suppose you're fully booked by guests?"

"I expect I could fit you in. When are you free?"

"Oh dear, I'd forgotten – my time off probably coincides with yours," she said regretfully.

"Then I'll teach you in my off-time," he answered easily.

"Oh, no, that wouldn't be fair. Your off-time is your off-time."

"On-time or off-time, I spend most of it underwater. I'd like to teach you," he said, with apparent sincerity. "How about next Sunday afternoon?"

She hesitated. "Well . . . are you sure?"

"I wouldn't offer if I wasn't. Two o'clock suit you?"

"Yes, that would be fine. It really is very good of you."

"We'll meet down here at two, then. Oh, there's just one thing — you look pretty healthy to me, but have you ever had any sinus or ear trouble?"

Caroline shook her head.

Jake grinned. "Well, I'm sure you haven't got false teeth, and I can't see any sign of varicose veins. Try and remember not to eat anything indigestible for Sunday lunch, will you? And don't have any fizzy drinks either. I don't suppose you normally suffer from dyspepsia, but even a touch of it can be dangerous when one is diving."

"I'll remember."

Caroline watched him spring to his feet with the same lithe co-ordination of muscle with which he had sat down.

"I must be off. See you on Sunday, then, Caroline." With a smile and a flip of his hand, he moved off.

He was only of medium height, but he was so superbly built and carried himself so well that Caroline watched him all the way along the beach until he disappeared behind some changing cabanas.

Then she had another dip in the sea, and when she came out for the second time Eve and Marie-Laure were approaching.

Watching the French girl stretching herself out on a towel, after carefully oiling herself with Ambre Solaire, Caroline thought that Jake Macauley had summed her up rather well.

"Can you really not swim, Marie-Laure, or was Eve only joking this morning?" she asked her.

Marie-Laure adjusted her sunglasses, and wriggled herself into a more comfortable position. "No, I hate water," she said, with a grimace. "In France it is not necessary for women to be athletic."

"Heavens, I'm not athletic. I can't even play tennis." Caroline turned to Eve. "I've been talking to Mr. Macaulley, the diving instructor. Why did you say he was a mystery man?"

"Oh, it was just an impression I had from talking to Mr. Newbolt's secretary about him. She happened to mention that he's always pretty evasive about his background, and also kind of moody sometimes. I guess I was exaggerating a little when I called him mysterious," Eve said, pulling on her bathing cap.

"I wish there were more young men here. It is going to be very dull if we never meet anyone but old husbands," said Marie-Laure plaintively.

She sounded so dejected that the other two burst out laughing.

"I'm sure there are some younger men around," Eve said cheerfully. "We've only been here five minutes." But she sounded as if she was not greatly concerned, and Caroline thought that she was probably already involved with someone in New York.

Next day the weather was cooler. But not nearly as cool as it would be at home, Caroline reflected, as she put on a light white sweater and pleated skirt. She resolved to buy an alarm clock, and keep it set at half past six so that every morning she could have a lovely long bathe before the working day began. Eve only swam when the temperature of the sea was over sixty-five degrees, as it had been the

previous day. But for Caroline, sixty was warm enough.

During that first week, Eve decided that if the salon was going to run smoothly they would each have to specialize to a certain extent.

"There seems to be an above-average demand for pedicures here," she said, studying the appointments book on Thursday night. "It follows, I guess. I mean everyone goes around barelegged, so their toenails are noticed more. I think the best plan is for you to concentrate on manicures and pedicures, Marie-Laure, and Caroline can do the bulk of the facial treatments. I'll deal with the massages and epilations. Of course there'll be times when we'll have to change around and help each other out, but I think that will be the most efficient basis to work on."

On Saturday, Marie-Laure was invited to partner one of the guests to the hotel's Carnival Night. There was dancing in the Tropicana ballroom every evening, but Saturday night was the high-spot of the week.

"Who is your escort?" Eve asked, amused by the rather smug tone in which the French girl announced this piece of news.

"Oh, I met him on the beach when I was there for a little while at lunchtime. He is not very handsome or amusing. In Paris I would not look at him. But here" — Marie-Laure gave a very Gallic shrug — "one must accept what offers. I did not come to Bermuda to spend the evenings reading books."

"I'm quite happy to spend *my* evening with a book," Eve said to Caroline later, after Marie-Laure had gone off to the dance in a cloud of "Tsarina".

"Me too." Caroline settled herself in one of the chairs along the verandah, and propped her feet one on another. "If we carry on at this rate, we shall need reinforcements."

"Yes, it has been a busy week. But maybe the present batch of guests happen to be particularly beauty-conscious. It's early to draw any conclusion yet. My, just look at those stars! Aren't they beautiful?" Eve leaned comfortably back in her chair to contemplate the brilliant night sky.

It must have been late when Marie-Laure returned from the dance because, when they peeped into her room next morning, she was still soundly asleep.

"There's no point in disturbing her. I must go over to the salon and do some paperwork," Eve said, after quietly closing the door of the French girl's cabin. "What about you, Caroline? Have you any plans?"

"I think I'll go exploring – unless you would like me to help you?" Caroline offered.

"No, there's really nothing you can do, thanks. If you want to go places, why not borrow one of the hotel bicycles? They have quite a fleet of them," Eve told her.

So, after breakfast, Caroline put on a shirt and a pair of pants, and followed up Eve's suggestion. Several other people had had the same idea, and she pedalled down the drive behind a middle-aged American couple whose normal form of transport was probably a gleaming fish-tailed Cadillac. But judging by the badinage they were exchanging, they were thoroughly enjoying the novelty of sight-seeing on two wheels.

It was a bright breezy morning, with snowy cotton-wool clouds scudding across a sky as blue as a periwinkle. Coming to the top of a hill, Caroline found that she could see almost the whole of Bermuda. Surrounded by the calm brilliant sea, and scattered with white-roofed houses, the islands looked so beautiful that she had a feeling she might suddenly wake up and find it was all a dream.

About ten o'clock, she turned a corner by a pink-washed cottage with mass of vivid bougainvillea climbing its walls, and found herself passing a yard where two coloured youths were rubbing down an upturned dinghy. A notice over the open gateway read: "Boats For Hire. Sailing, Game Fishing Etc. Apply J. Cooper."

Caroline braked, sat making up her mind for a few moments, and then dismounted and pushed the cycle into the yard.

"Is Mr. Cooper about?" she asked one of the youths.

Before he could answer, an older man, possibly his father, emerged from a shed at the side of the yard.

"Mornin', missy. You lookin' for me?"

"Mr. Cooper? I was wondering if I could hire a boat for a couple of hours. A small boat. How much do you charge?"

Mr. Cooper scratched his chin and considered. "Mos' folks hire a boat by the day, but I reckon I can fix you up, missy."

He gestured for her to follow him, and led the way round the corner of the shed, past a parked white sports car and on to a rather ramshackle jetty.

"Would the *Mermaid* suit you?" He pointed to an old-fashioned clinker-built dinghy, an eleven-footer of no recognizable class, which was bobbing gently on her mooring about fifty yards out.

"Yes, she would be fine – if I've got enough money on me." Caroline looked at him enquiringly.

"Say a pound?"

"Oh, yes, I can manage that."

Caroline handed him a note, and began to turn up her trouser legs while Mr. Cooper called to one of the youths to come and row her out to the mooring.

As she had guessed, the *Mermaid* had been built in Mr.

Cooper's yard. But just after he had told her this, and as she was pulling on the sweater she had brought in her bicycle basket, someone behind them said, "Wait a minute, Sam. Are you sure she can handle the *Mermaid*?"

With her head inside the sweater, Caroline stiffened. Not only did she recognize the voice but – five minutes too late! – she knew she ought to have recognized the white car.

Pushing her head through the neckhole, she looked frostily up at Ian Dryden, and said, "Of course I can handle her. I wouldn't be hiring her if I couldn't."

"Hm . . . ever sailed alone before?" His hands in the pockets of a pair of salt-stained khaki shorts, he watched her straightening the sweater and smoothing her rumpled hair.

"Dozens of times. I've been sailing since I was nine."

"But not in these waters, and the wind is fairly fresh today."

"I'll manage, thank you." Caroline moved away to where the lanky brown boy was waiting to assist her into the tender. But as she seated herself on the stern thwart, Ian Dryden said, "Hold it, Ben," and stepped down into the boat with them.

"Better be safe than sorry. If you really know your stuff, you won't mind giving me a demonstration," he said casually, settling himself beside her.

This high-handed action made Caroline so furious that for some seconds she was lost for words. And before she could recover herself, Ben shoved off and began to row out to the *Mermaid*. So, short of demanding to be put ashore again – a recourse which would only make her feel more foolish – she had no choice but to suppress her indignant protests and make the best of the situation.

The *Mermaid* was already facing upwind, and Ben-

brought the dinghy alongside, shipped his near oar and grabbed hold of the sailing boat's hull.

He grinned at Caroline. "Okay to go aboard, ma'am."

If Caroline had been alone, the familiar routine of making ready would have presented no problem. But in a strange boat, and with Ian Dryden watching her every movement, she was suddenly so nervous that what was normally second nature to her became a complex routine requiring all her concentration.

He made no attempt to help her bend on the sails and check the rigging but, when she was finally ready to cast off, he said, "Do you want me to take the jib sheet?"

Caroline gave him a brief and hostile glance. "I thought the object of the exercise was to prove that I can handle her alone. Just don't get in my way, please." She felt in her pocket for a handkerchief, and used it to tie back her hair so that it would not blow across her eyes. "I presume you can swim. If not, you'd better put on a lifejacket."

His laugh rang out across the water. With apparently genuine amusement, he said, "Don't worry, Miss Browning, I can swim."

Caroline had been skirting the absolute truth in saying that she had often sailed alone. It was true that she had frequently raced the Browning boys' *Cadet* single-handed, and had both crewed and skippered a number of larger boats belonging to her brothers' sailing club friends. But she had never actually sailed an eleven-footer unaided, and although she had no misgivings about her competence to do so, it was more than five months since she had done any sailing at all and she could not be certain of showing herself at her best.

Luckily, the waters of the bay were so crystal clear that – unlike those of the East Anglian estuary where she sailed during the summer holiday – there was little risk of acci-

dentally running aground.

Once the boat had gathered steerage way, and the tiller was alive, most of her nervousness dissipated. For one thing she was much too busy trimming her sheets and anticipating the vagaries of the wind to have time to feel self-conscious any more. And very soon the sheer exhilaration of running before the wind on a sea of such shimmering blueness was a delight that even Ian Dryden's presence could not spoil.

For half an hour she exerted every ounce of her prowess to put on a crack demonstration of reaching, tacking and neat unflurried gybing. And when she finally turned the *Mermaid* into the wind she had the satisfaction of knowing that even Mr. Dryden could not have found any serious faults with her performance.

"Would you like me to capsize her to prove that I can cope with that too?" she asked brightly. For she was fairly sure that after a deliberate capsize it would not be beyond her to climb on to the centreplate and lever the boat upright again. She had been careful to check that there was a big bailer aboard.

His dark eyes glinted at the note of challenge in her voice.

"Much as I'm sure you would enjoy giving me a ducking, I don't think that will be necessary, Miss Browning," he answered mildly.

"Well, if you're satisfied that I'm not likely to drown myself, I'll take you back to the boatyard. Or would you like to take a turn at the helm now? I'm always happy to pick up tips from a real expert."

His hard mouth twitched with amusement, and she knew it would take more than sarcasm to ruffle him.

"You're a belligerent young thing, aren't you?" he said lazily. "Are you always so touchy when your capabilities

are questioned?"

Caroline gave him a level look. "Only when someone is patronizing," she replied composedly.

Before he could answer this, they both turned to look at a high-powered motor-boat which had come streaking into the view from the next bay, its bows well out of the water, a cloud of churning spray foaming out in its wake.

As it passed the point of the headland, its occupant reduced throttle and veered inshore towards the idling *Mermaid*. As it drew nearer, Caroline saw that there was a girl at the wheel.

Evidently Ian Dryden knew her. He raised an arm and waved.

The launch still had too much speed to approach them directly, but after lewing in a wide circle the girl cut out the motor and brought the launch more or less to a standstill within twenty feet of them.

"I thought it might be you, Ian," she called. "I phoned the house and they said you'd gone down to the yard. What on earth are you doing in the old *Mermaid*?"

She was wearing a white chiffon scarf over her hair, the ends bound round her throat and knotted at the nape of her neck. And her eyes were concealed by a pair of large dark glasses. So, apart from noting that she had full vividly-painted lips, it was not possible to tell how old she was, or whether her eyes matched her mouth. But Caroline had heard almost identical voices many times in London. And that type of exaggerated drawl – the voice usually raised so that everyone around could hear what its owner was saying – was one of her pet aversions.

"I'm not sailing her. I'm a passenger," Ian Dryden called back. "Hang on, you can give me a lift, Elaine." And then he turned to Caroline, and said, "You needn't bother to take me back after all, Miss Browning. But per-

haps you'd be good enough to give my things to Sam Cooper. Tell him I'll pick up the car later on, will you?"

He had already stripped off his shirt before she grasped his intention. Then he unlaced his canvas deck shoes, and emptied the pockets of his shorts.

"Brace yourself. I'm going over the side."

"Your watch . . ." Caroline exclaimed.

But her reminder came too late. He had already dived into the sea.

The *Mermaid* rocked, and by the time she was steady again Ian Dryden was hauling himself aboard the scarlet motor launch, the water streaming from his broad teak-brown shoulders.

As soon as he was settled beside her, the girl called Elaine switched on the motor, and seconds later the launch was careering on its way back to the next bay.

At twelve o'clock, Caroline sailed the *Mermaid* back to her mooring, and halloed for someone to ferry her to the jetty.

Mr. Cooper was not surprised when she handed over Ian Dryden's belongings.

"I reck'n that'll be Missy Fitzgerald," he said, after Caroline had explained what had happened. "Sounds like she's back from her trip to the States. The Fitzgerald place is right next to the Dryden place. Mister Ian and Missy 'Laine always been very attached since they was children."

"I see. Well, thank you, Mr. Cooper. I'd like to hire the *Mermaid* again some time," Caroline said, as he walked to the gate with her.

"Any time, missy. Friends of Mister Ian is always welcome."

After lunch with the two other girls, Caroline set out for her diving lesson. She was a little early and, as there

were no hotel guests on the beach at that hour, she lay on a lounge in the shade of a fringed umbrella to wait for Jake to arrive.

Although she had been careful not to eat too much lunch, the sea air and the exertions of the morning had made her drowsy, and she was almost asleep when something touched her foot.

Rousing up with a start, she found Jake sitting on the end of the lounge.

"Wake up, Sleeping Beauty — or would you rather spend the afternoon relaxing?"

"Oh, no . . . I was only dozing." Caroline swung her legs off the lounge, and stood up and stretched herself. The breeze of the morning had dropped, and it was now really hot in the full sun.

Jake was carrying a large canvas bag, and wearing navy boxer shorts. He said, "We'll go to the next beach. There won't be so many people about. This place gets crowded on Sunday afternoons."

At the southern end of the Tropicana beach there was a rocky promontory and, beyond it, another cove which anyone in Bermuda could use.

"How the boys would love this," Caroline said, half to herself, when she was taking off her gaily striped beach shift, one of the things her mother had made for her.

"The boys?" Jake queried, looking up from unpacking his bag.

"My brothers," she explained. "There are four of us altogether. Which reminds me, I must take some snaps to send home. Not that black and white photographs can possibly do justice to this scenery. I shall have to splurge on some colour film."

Jake sat back on his heels and watched her taking off her sandals. "I like that swimsuit. One-piece suits are bet-

ter than bikinis for diving. They don't come adrift so easily."

"I have got a bikini, but I don't think I shall wear it much. I'm not the type," Caroline said seriously.

Jake grinned. "You ought to see some of the old dears who trot around in them." His tone changed. "I should say you'd look pretty good in one."

She smiled at him. "Thank you – but, as you say, they have been known to come adrift and, unlike Marie-Laure, I like being in the sea more than sitting around on the beach. I wonder why she doesn't like the water. Perhaps some idiot heaved her in when she was little. I think that's criminal, don't you?"

"Yes, stupid," Jake agreed. "Talking of Marie-Laure, I saw her this morning when I was passing by your cabins. The first time I met her, she was a shade offhand. Today I was greeted right royally. Why the thaw, do you suppose?"

Caroline laughed. "Well, we've all come to the conclusion that the one thing Bermuda lacks is men under sixty. I expect she was just pleased to see a man without a tum and a bald head."

Jake grinned. Then, his expression altering, he said, "Is that why you wanted these lessons – because I'm under sixty and haven't run to fat yet?"

There was something in his face which puzzled her. She had a feeling that his question was less casual than it sounded; that it might even be a trip question. But what was in his mind she could not fathom.

"No, it wasn't," she answered truthfully. "I planned to learn skin-diving before I got here. I would have asked about lessons if you hadn't a hair on your head. Why not? An instructor is an instructor." She paused, still unable to read his face. "Of course it's more fun to be taught by someone about my own age." A possibility occurred to

her. "Heavens, there are simpler ways of getting to know people than by pretending to want to learn what they happen to teach. Anyway, it was you who approached me in the first place."

The strange look disappeared. "Yes, I did, didn't I?" He fished in the bag and produced a couple of diving masks. "Sorry, Caroline. I suppose I'm out of touch with girls like you. Most of the people I meet . . . well, let's say that in Bermuda the norm is reversed. Try these flippers for size, will you?"

Caroline had not really understood what he was talking about, but she felt it was best not to pursue the matter – at least not for the present.

"We'll start with simple duck-diving," Jake said. "There's a lot to learn before you graduate to Scuba."

"What's Scuba?" Caroline asked.

"It stands for Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus – diving with an aqua-lung so that you can stay for quite long periods. Now there are two things I want you to remember. Never dive alone, and never dive without a knife. I've got one for you here." He walked across to her, and buckled a webbing belt round her waist, so that the sheath for the knife hung over her right hip bone. "Practise drawing it, but take care you don't cut yourself. It's very sharp," he warned.

"What is it for exactly?" Caroline asked.

"Oh, you might get tangled up in some seaweed. A couple of weeks ago I was hunting octopuses and I came across one which was bigger than most. He was hanging on to some coral, and then he grabbed hold of me. If I hadn't had a knife I'd still be wrestling with him."

Caroline shuddered. "Ugh! What a horrible experience. I should have been terrified. Are there many octopuses in the sea here?"

Jake laughed. "Only little chaps, and they won't interfere with you if you leave them alone. Flippers comfortable? Right: now we'll try a mask on. What about your hair? Are you going to wear a cap today?"

"No, I'll leave it loose. I've got to set it tonight anyway." She pushed it back behind her ears. "If I could, I'd always swim without a cap. But I can't appear in the salon with rat's tails."

Jake was adjusting the strap of the diving mask. "It seems a funny sort of job for a girl like you to choose . . . being cooped up with a lot of old women all day. What made you go in for it?"

"It's hard to say exactly," Caroline said reflectively. "I just suddenly knew it was what I wanted to do. Luckily for me, my parents could afford the fee for the six months' basic training at the Sanchia beauty school. But even after that, they still had more or less to keep me for another eighteen months."

"Good lord, do you mean it was two years before you started to earn a reasonable screw?" Jake asked in astonishment. "What a racket! I mean, it's only a question of slapping on the war-paint and plucking the old dears' eyebrows and so forth, isn't it?"

"Certainly not! — and not all our clients are 'old dears'," Caroline told him firmly. "You may not realize it, but beauty culture is quite a scientific business nowadays. To begin with we have to know all about the structure of the skin, and about muscles and nerve centres. And then there's the effleurage and petrissage and tapotement and —"

Jake cut her short. "What the devil is effleurage? Sounds like something to do with bad drains."

"You're thinking of effluvium," Caroline told him, laughing. "Effleurage is a type of massage . . . very gentle and soothing."

"Is that so?" He gave a mischievous look. "Perhaps, later on, you could try it on me. However, at the moment I'm supposed to be teaching you. Let's get this mask on."

By the end of her first lesson, Caroline had learned how to dive to a depth of about twenty feet, first treading water and taking several deep breaths, and then jackknifing down to the sea-bed until her breath began to give out and she had to ascend slowly to the surface and gulp another lungful of air. Although she was already a practised swimmer, the technique of diving was more difficult than she had anticipated. It was important to enter the water with a minimum of splashing, so as not to frighten away all the fish in the area, and at first she found it hard to judge how long her breath would last.

"The more you practise, the easier it will get and the longer your breath will last," Jake told her. "Never over-exert yourself underwater. Let your arms trail, and keep your body relaxed. Your legs and flippers should be doing all the work. And don't stay down so long that you have to come up with a rush, or hold your last reserve of breath as you do come up. That's the way to get an air embolism,"

"What's that?" Caroline asked.

"It's a rupture of part of the wall of your lungs caused by the air inside them expanding while the outside pressure is decreasing," Jake explained. "If it happens, the only thing to do is to rush the victim to the nearest decompression chamber. But don't worry; it won't happen to you as long as you remember what I tell you."

Although that first lesson was not a long one, Caroline found that she was surprisingly tired when he made her return to the beach. Her first glimpse of the strange and magical world beneath the sea made her eager for the day when she would be ready to try Scuba diving. But for the moment she was glad to lie down on the sand and rest,

while Jake uncapped a flask of iced coffee and peeled a couple of oranges.

"When you begin to know your stuff, we'll go out to one of the reefs, and then you'll really wish you were a mermaid," he said, rolling up his towel and slipping it under her head to make her more comfortable.

"Mm . . . I could lie here for ever, just gazing at the sky and listening to the sea," Caroline said dreamily. She nibbled a segment of orange. "How long will it be before I'm ready for the reef?"

"Oh, half a dozen lessons from now. Tell you what, if you don't mind getting up at dawn. I'll give you some pre-breakfast instruction."

"Would you? Oh yes, please, Jake. Incidentally, I don't know what your charges are."

He lay down on the sand beside her, propped up on his elbows so that he could look down at her face.

"To you my services are free," he said, with a smile.

"Oh, no, that wouldn't be right. It's your job," she objected, shading her eyes against the sun.

Jake touched her cheek with his forefinger. "You know, there must be something in this beauty business. Your skin is like a ripe peach."

"Thank you, Mr. Macauley — but you're changing the subject. You must see that I can't let you teach me for nothing. I'd feel I was imposing on you."

He rolled over and sat up with his back to her. "Are you worried that I might be planning to make a pass at you?" he asked, rather brusquely.

Caroline sat up too. "Why, no, it hadn't even occurred to me." She put her hand on his shoulder and gave him a little shake. "Why are you so touchy? I didn't mean to offend you. But you are a professional instructor, and —"

"Listen, you said earlier on that it was more fun to be

taught by someone roughly your own age," he cut in. "Well, it's more fun for me too. As far as you're concerned I'm just someone you met on the beach who knows about diving . . . okay?"

Caroline hesitated, once again puzzled by his manner.

Then as he turned his head to look at her, she smiled and nodded. "Okay . . . and thank you, Jake."

Later on, they swam together, alternately racing and floating in the sparkling turquoise water, and afterwards playing leapfrog in the shallows until they were both out of breath and had to stagger up the beach and collapse, laughing, on their towels again.

Caroline would have been happy to stay at the cove until sundown. But about five o'clock, Jake looked at his watch and said he must be getting back to the hotel.

"Oh, must you? So early? Well, perhaps I should too. The others may be wondering what has happened to me." Reluctant to bring the happy afternoon to an end, Caroline brushed down her sandy legs and reached for her shift.

"I shall be out late tonight, so I won't see you tomorrow morning. But how about Tuesday at seven?" Jake suggested, when they parted in the hotel gardens.

"Yes, that would be fine. 'Bye." Swinging her beach bag, Caroline took the path which led to the girls' cabins, while Jake went off in another direction.

That night, composing a second letter to her parents, she wrote:

"... and so Jake is giving me another lesson on Tuesday, providing the weather is suitable. So far it's been wonderful, but the 'season' doesn't start officially until mid-April. Jake is so nice. I know you would like him. But he's definitely not a millionaire in disguise, Mother

— at least I shouldn't think so. Actually I don't know much about him yet."

For the benefit of her brothers, she also described her morning's sail, but she did not mention Ian Dryden's part in it.

Folding the airmail form and writing her parents' address on the outside, she thought how strange it was that one could meet new people and react so differently to them. With both Jake and Eve she had felt a spontaneous sense of amity within seconds of meeting them. Marie-Laure she liked, but on a more superficial basis. Ian Dryden had put her back up with his first sardonic glance; and in the case of his friend, Elaine Fitzgerald, merely the sound of her voice had sparked antagonism.

On Monday afternoon Caroline heard that drawling voice for the second time. Being free for twenty minutes between appointments, she was having a chat with the receptionist, when a client walked into the waiting-room.

She was a girl of about twenty-five, expensively dressed in a pale caramel jersey suit, with striking dark auburn hair brushed back from a high forehead and falling loosely round her to just below ear-tip level with the ends curving in to her neck. It was the kind of deceptively simple hairstyle which Caroline recognized as the result of masterly cutting and the lightest possible body perming.

"Good afternoon. I've torn a nail. Could someone repair it for me before I lose it altogether?" The girl held out a slim hand, showing long beautifully manicured fingers. The nail on her index finger was split halfway across.

As soon as she opened her mouth, Caroline recognized her as the girl in the scarlet speedboat.

"I'm afraid the manicurist is engaged at the moment, madam," the receptionist told her. "If you would care to

wait fifteen minutes, I'll see if she can fit you in. But we're rather heavily booked today."

Miss Fitzgerald frowned. "Oh, what a bore. But I don't want to go all the way into Hamilton. Yes, very well, I'll wait."

Caroline glanced at her watch. It would be another ten minutes before her next client arrived; ample time to repair one broken fingernail.

"I can attend to madam, Rose," she said to the receptionist. "Would you come this way, please, madam."

Up to that moment, Elaine Fitzgerald had not looked at her. But as soon as Caroline had shown her into a treatment room and fetched a manicure tray, she said, "Aren't you the girl who was sailing the *Mermaid* on Sunday morning?"

"Yes, I am." Caroline put a cushion on her lap, laid a clean towel across it and reached for the older girl's hand. "I shall have to remove your nail varnish. It's our 'Vin Topaze', isn't it?"

"Yes, I always use Sanchia cosmetics. Now that this place has opened, I may as well come here for treatments. It will be more convenient than going into Hamilton. Wait a minute, I want to light a cigarette." Miss Fitzgerald withdrew her hand from the cushion, delved into a caramel suede bag with a tortoiseshell handle, and produced a shagreen cigarette box and matching lighter.

Caroline put an ash-tray on the table beside her. "I'm not quite sure if we can take clients who are not staying at the hotel. But I'll certainly enquire for you," she said politely.

"Oh, it will be all right in my case. I'm seeing Mr. Dryden tonight. I'll mention it to him then," Miss Fitzgerald said carelessly. She exhaled a cloud of smoke. "Where did you learn to sail?"

There was a note in her voice which suggested that in her opinion sailing was the prerogative of wealthy Bermudians, and not the kind of pastime which she would have expected an English beauty operative to indulge in.

"My uncle taught me. My brothers and I have had a boat since we were quite small." Having removed the varnish, Caroline examined the fractured nail. "It's a bad break. I can mend it, but you'll have to be very careful not to put any pressure on it, Miss Fitzgerald. It would really be better to trim it down."

"Oh, I can't go to a party with uneven nails. Just do the best you can." Another cloud of smoke came wafting past Caroline's head. "How do you know my name?"

"Mr. Cooper mentioned it when I left Mr. Dryden's shirt with him and explained why I had come back alone."

"I see. I gather you resented Mr. Dryden testing your proficiency. You do realize, I suppose, that he virtually owns this hotel?"

"So I understand," Caroline said evenly, wondering what he had said about her. But if he owned every hotel in Bermuda, it wouldn't entitle him to be rude and overbearing, she thought. And it was the memory of his attitude at the airport which impelled her, perhaps unwisely, to say aloud, "But of course he has only limited jurisdiction over this salon."

Elaine Fitzgerald made no comment on this remark, but Caroline was pretty sure it would be retailed to Ian Dryden during the evening. Indeed, that was why she had said it.

By the time she had been in Bermuda three weeks, Caroline was golden brown and filled with such a buoyant sense of physical well-being that the busiest day at the salon failed to tire her, and she was invariably the first of

the three girls to bounce out of bed.

"You English are so energetic," Marie-Laure said peevishly, when they were having breakfast one morning. "Must you sing when you cook the breakfast, Caroline? In France we do not have this big meal to begin the day. Me, I would prefer only a cup of coffee and more sleep."

"I'm sorry, Marie-Laure," Caroline said contritely. "I'll try to be quieter tomorrow. But I can't help bursting into song on heavenly mornings like this. We are lucky, you know. In Mother's letter yesterday she said it was still absolutely freezing."

Later, while Marie-Laure was taking a shower, Eve said, "I'm a bit worried about her, Caroline. She was out till one o'clock last night, and I don't much like the look of this guy she's dating. He's got 'wolf' written all over him."

"Oh, I imagine Marie-Laure can take care of herself," Caroline said reassuringly. "There's a good deal of common sense under that butterfly exterior, don't you think?"

"I hope so," Eve said anxiously. "After all, I shall be held responsible if she gets into any kind of a mess. And it doesn't do the salon any good for her to be seen around with one of the local Lotharios – which I'm quite sure he is. He could even be married. She says not, but I don't see how she can be certain."

"Shall I ask Jake? He seems to know most of the people who live in the colony," Caroline suggested.

"Oh, would you? Thanks. It might ease my mind a bit. Talking of Jake, has he never suggested a date with you? – apart from your diving sessions, I mean."

Caroline shook her head. "No, I gather his evenings are pretty tied up. I don't know what with exactly, but that's the impression he gives. Perhaps he's going steady, as you'd say."

"Surely he would have mentioned it if he was."

"Not necessarily. He's not at all communicative about himself, and I don't ask questions."

"Well, if he has a girl, how come he spends Sundays with you?"

Caroline shrugged. "I don't know."

"Wouldn't you like to go out with him?" Eve asked curiously. "I'm sure you must have had a lot of dates at home, but here you haven't been out at all in the evening. At least only with me, and that isn't quite the same thing."

Twice in the past fortnight, the two girls had ventured into Hamilton together and had supper at a restaurant.

"Yes, I suppose I would like to go out with Jake," Caroline said thoughtfully. "I haven't really thought about it before. After all, I've only known him three weeks." She smiled suddenly. "It is about time I wore one of the evening dresses Mother made for me. Maybe I'll drop a hint that I'd like to go to the Carnival dance this Saturday. Incidentally, tomorrow is a big day. Jake says I'm ready to advance to Scuba."

But when she met him on the beach in the morning, Jake had not brought the aqua-lung equipment with him.

"I'm sorry, Caroline, no diving this morning," he said, when she joined him outside the changing cabanas.

"What's the matter? You look dreadful . . . are you ill?" she asked concernedly.

"It's nothing, only a headache. I'm sorry to disappoint you. Though in any case the sea is a bit rough for getting off the rocks." He gestured towards the breakers lashing the promontory at the end of the bay.

"It doesn't matter. There are plenty of other days. Would you like some coffee? I've brought a flask."

"Thanks . . . just what I need." Jake slid down on to the sand, with his back against the wall of the cabana. "As a matter of fact I've got one hell of a hangover," he said

ruefully. "Diving and drinking don't go together, so I usually keep off the hard stuff. But last night I was feeling browned off, so I went on a binge. It's my own fault if I feel rough this morning."

Caroline sat beside him, out of the wind. Pouring the coffee, she said, "Why were you browned off?"

It was a natural enough question, but the moment she had asked it, she felt the barrier of reserve going up. Or was it only her imagination because of Eve's first remark about him?

"Oh, you know how it is . . . one gets these moods sometimes. Mm . . . good coffee."

Was his answer the simple truth or an evasion? Caroline could not be sure. Anyway, if he had a headache it was not the moment to start probing.

"Jake, do you know anything about a man called Hazlitt? He runs a pale blue coupé. I don't know the make. I think it's a French car."

"Miles Hazlitt? I don't know him personally. I've seen him around. Why?"

Caroline explained about Marie-Laure and Eve's concern for her.

"I should think she can handle him," Jake said, after a moment's consideration. "He's probably fairly harmless for anyone over twenty-one, and Marie-Laure doesn't strike me as the naïve type." He drank some more coffee. "I wouldn't care to see you running around with him."

"Am I naïve?" she asked.

"Nice girls usually are at your age."

"Marie-Laure is a nice girl," Caroline said, rather indignantly. "Just because she's French and wears rather tight dresses it doesn't mean—"

"Okay, okay, don't bite my head off! I didn't say she wasn't, did I?"

"Not in so many words, perhaps."

"All I meant was that I don't think you have as much experience of handling types like Hazlitt as Marie-Laure has," Jake said, with studied patience. "I expect she's a very nice girl, but as far as I'm concerned you're nicer."

Unexpectedly, he reached out a hand and laced his brown fingers through hers. "Would you spring to my defence if you thought someone was maligning me?"

"Of course," she said simply.

"Even though you don't know much about me?"

Caroline looked at their interlocked hands. "One can make up one's mind about people without knowing their life history."

"One can also be mistaken. Since we're down here, let's go for a walk, shall we? The wind will clear my thick head." He sprang to his feet and pulled her up with him, releasing her hand when she was standing.

"There's someone else I've been meaning to ask you about," she said, as they crossed the sand. "Have you ever come across Elaine Fitzgerald?"

"I've touched my forelock to her a couple of times," Jake said on a satiric note. "The Fitzgeralds are one of the F.F.B., which, in case you don't know yet, stands for First Families of Bermuda. Why the interest in Miss Fitzgerald?"

"Oh, no special reason. She came into the salon once, and I gather she's a close friend of Mr. Dryden."

"Naturally — the Drydens are also of the élite. There may be an alliance in the offing."

"You mean they're going to get married?"

"Probably. The F.F.B. usually inter-marry. It can't be official yet or there would have been appropriate tribal rites. Look, about your next diving lesson, I think we'll

postpone it till Sunday when we'll have the whole morning to ourselves. Unless you've fixed something else up?"

"No, Sunday would be lovely, Jake," Caroline said readily.

And it was not until she was on her way back to the cabins that she remembered she had meant to bring up the subject of the Saturday night gala.

During the afternoon she had an appointment with a Mrs. Meredith whose face she recognized at once, but whom she could not place.

"Why, you're Caroline, aren't you? You used to work in the Bond Street salon?" Mrs. Meredith said, with smiling surprise. "I almost didn't recognize you because of your tan, and I can see you don't remember me."

"Yes, I do – but I'm afraid I've forgotten your name," Caroline apologized. "I mean I don't remember treating anyone called Meredith. Perhaps you only came to us occasionally."

"Well, it was really my mother you treated. I only had hairdos and manicures. My mother was Mrs. Otway," the girl explained.

"Oh, Mrs. Otway . . . yes, of course, I remember now. How nice to see you again. Are you on holiday here?"

"No, I live here. My husband is a Bermudian. Is the salon reserved for residents at the hotel? I heard it was open to anyone, and my husband and I do come to the hotel a good deal."

"Well, I'm sure it's all right in your case, as you've been a client of ours in London."

Caroline led her into the treatment room and helped her to take off her dress and unfasten her necklace.

"Is your mother living here in Bermuda too?" she asked. "It must be eighteen months since she last came to the London salon."

"Yes, she does live with us. But she's away in New York at the moment," Mrs. Meredith explained, as she lay on the couch and Caroline wrapped a blanket round her. As the salon was air-conditioned, the temperature of the treatment rooms was the same as it had been in London.

Caroline slipped a bandeau over Mrs. Meredith's hair, and settled herself on the stool at the head of the couch.

I pity your husband with Mrs. Otway in residence, she thought. For it had all come back to her. Mrs. Meredith's first name was Nona, and her mother was the type of woman whom the girls at the London salon classified as "arch-harridans".

As far as Caroline could recollect, Nona Otway, as she then was, had always been rather a quiet girl. But today, while Caroline cleaned off her make-up and applied a lanolin cream to lubricate her skin while it was being massaged, she began to pour out all that had happened to her since their last meeting.

Apparently her husband was a widower — a man considerably older than herself, Caroline deduced — and a very wealthy one, judging by her references to his cars, and his yacht, and his collection of valuable paintings.

By the time Caroline had applied a toning mask and tied up Nona's chin, she had formed the impression that, in spite of living in the lap of luxury, her client was very far from being happy.

In fact I wouldn't mind betting that she was pushed into marriage by her horrible old mother, she thought to herself, as she slipped quietly out of the room to have a cup of coffee while the mask did its work.

"It's closing time now, isn't it?" Nona asked, when Caroline had finished making her up. "Why don't you come and have tea with me? My car is outside and it's only a short drive."

Caroline demurred, "It's very kind of you, Mrs. Meredith, but I don't think —"

"Oh, please, do come. It's nice to meet someone I knew in London, and I would love to show you the house. My husband won't be home until half past seven so we can have a nice quiet talk about old times. And don't be formal — call me Nona."

But we scarcely know each other, Caroline thought. And then, because the other girl seemed so genuinely anxious for her to accept — almost like a child begging for a special treat — she said, "Very well. But I must just tidy up here. Do you mind waiting five minutes?"

An hour later, after being shown all over the Merediths' magnificent family mansion, Caroline found herself sitting in an elegantly appointed drawing-room with a coloured butler waiting to hand her the tea Nona was pouring from a Queen Anne silver teapot.

"It's the most beautiful house I've ever seen," Caroline said sincerely, when they were alone.

"Yes, it is lovely, isn't it. My husband's family have lived here since 1750. It's one of the oldest large houses in the colony," Nona told her.

Earlier, when she had been showing Caroline her bedroom — the french windows opening on to a balcony overlooking the blue expanse of Harrington Sound — someone meeting her for the first time might have felt there was an element of ostentation in the way she had flung open the clothes-packed wardrobes, and the doors of her private bathroom and boudoir.

But Caroline sensed that she was not intentionally showing off. Indeed she had a feeling that, by parading her opulent mode of life, Nona was somehow reassuring herself of her own good fortune. It was as if she was saying to herself, "I have this and this and this — so I must be

happy, mustn't I?"

And to Caroline, whose parents had always shared a bedroom, there was a good deal of significance in the fact that Hugo Meredith had a room of his own across the landing.

The large airy drawing-room had windows on both sides of the house, and shortly after seven o'clock they heard the sound of a car sweeping up the long driveway.

"That must be Hugo." Nona jumped up from the couch and ran to the window to confirm it. "Yes, it is," she said over her shoulder. Then, her voice dropping, "There's another car behind him . . . oh, it's Ian's."

"Not Ian Dryden?" Caroline said sharply.

"Yes, have you met him? He's one of Hugo's closest friends."

"Yes, I've met him." Caroline's instinct was to depart with all speed.

However, she could hardly dash off without saying how do you do to Nona's husband, she realized. There was nothing for it but to brace herself for another encounter with the autocratic Mr. Dryden.

It was some minutes before the two men reached the drawing-room, and during that time Nona was as visibly tense as Caroline felt inwardly.

Perhaps she doesn't like him either, Caroline thought, watching the other girl dabbing at her hair in front of an antique Venetian looking-glass on the wall near the doorway. Presently, shaking hands with Nona's husband, Caroline was surprised to find that he was not as elderly as she had anticipated. He had iron-grey hair which made him look oldish at first glance; but in fact he was not much more than thirty-five, only a year or two senior to Ian Dryden.

Nona introduced Caroline as if they were friends of long standing.

"Caroline has already met Ian, Hugo," she said, as her husband was about to present his friend.

"Oh, really? Well, let's all go out on to the terrace, shall we? What will you have to drink, Miss Browning?" – this as the butler reappeared.

Caroline had not missed the lifting of Ian Dryden's eyebrows when he first saw her sitting on the sofa. And she was conscious of his eyes on her now.

Glancing at her watch, she said, "Nothing for me, thank you. I really must be going now, Nona."

"Oh, you can't rush off when we've only just met again, Caroline. You must stay and dine with us. Yes, I insist."

Gaily overriding her objections, Nona took Caroline firmly by the arm and marshalled her out on to the terrace.

CHAPTER III

Two things spoiled Caroline's enjoyment of the delicious meal which was presently served in the colonnaded part of the broad paved terrace on the seaward side of the Merediths' gracious old house.

The setting in which the four of them sat down to dinner could scarcely have been more conducive to a memorable evening. Tubbed oleanders, their foliage starred with pink flowers, twined up the tall white columns supporting the balcony above. Beyond the terrace, smooth lawns stretched down to a sea tinged with old rose and mauve by the rays of the setting sun.

But as the meal progressed – a uniformed maid assisting the butler with the unobtrusive service of each course – Caroline began to long for it to be over. To be fair, the presence of Ian Dryden directly opposite her was only partly the cause of her increasing embarrassment. It was Nona who made the dinner such an ordeal.

From the moment of the men's arrival, an extraordinary change had come over her. Earlier, alone with Caroline, she had been talkative, but not effusive. Now she scarcely stopped prattling for a second. Her loquacity might have been bearable if it had been the natural outpouring of a lively and amusing personality. But her vivacity was so obviously forced, and the burden of her chatter so trivial, that it was painful to listen to her.

"What do you think of Bermuda, Miss Browning?" Hugo Meredith asked, taking advantage of one of his wife's infrequent pauses for breath to turn politely towards their guest.

"I imagine my opinion is the same as that of everyone

who comes here – that it's one of the most beautiful places in the world." Caroline answered, hoping she sounded more at ease than she felt.

"Have you travelled widely, Miss Browning?" This time it was Ian Dryden who put the question.

Having finished his lobster Thermidor before the others, he was leaning back in his chair, his long lean fingers toying with the stem of his wine glass.

"No, I haven't," Caroline said warily, wondering if he was merely making conversation or if he had guessed what her answer would be and intended to make her feel that her views were of little value.

If this had been his intention, it was frustrated by Nona launching into an account of a beach barbecue they had attended the night before.

When, at last, the meal drew to an end, Hugo asked the butler to serve coffee in the drawing-room.

"Would you excuse us for a few minutes?" he asked the two women. "I want to show Ian the blueprints for the new catamaran and I don't imagine they would interest you."

After they had gone, Nona led Caroline back to the drawing-room. "Hugo is mad about sailing. Most Bermudians are," she said in a flat voice, looking suddenly drained of all energy. "Unfortunately I get sea-sick, just looking at a boat, so it's an interest I can't share with him."

"Oh, what a pity. Have you tried taking pills?" Caroline asked.

"I've tried everything. They tell me it's all a question of will-power. I think I'm going to be ill and so I am."

"I don't know a great deal about it, but my uncle was in the Navy and I remember him telling us he had known veteran sailors who were always sick in really bad weather."

I'm sure it's not a thing one can help . . . any more than a claustrophobic can help being affected by confined spaces," Caroline said.

"Heaven knows I've tried to get over it," Nona said dully. "It makes me feel such a drag. Sailing and water sports are the be-all and end-all in Bermuda. You said at dinner that the islands were beautiful. I suppose they are a perfect place for a holiday, or for someone like yourself with a job to do. But it's another matter to live here."

"How do you mean?" Caroline asked.

The butler came in bearing a coffee service on an ornate silver tray. Nona waited until he had set it on a table beside the sofa.

"Thank you, Josiah. You needn't wait."

When they were alone again, she said, "I should think Bermudian society must be the most exclusive in the world. If you weren't born here, if you haven't an ancestor who came over on the *Plough* in 1612, then you might as well belong to a different species."

"But surely if your husband —"

"Yes, that does make *some* difference," Nona conceded, with a wry grimace. "If you're married to one of them, they do have to put on a show of accepting you. But it's only a façade. It doesn't mean that you're 'in'. In fact they never let you forget that you're not. Oh, it's very subtle. No one is openly unpleasant. But there's always . . . well, an atmosphere of hostility."

"Perhaps you're too sensitive," Caroline suggested uncomfortably. "It's always difficult adjusting to a new life among people who have known each other for years. They may not mean to make you feel an outsider."

"Oh, yes, they do," Nona retorted bitterly. "Didn't you notice that Ian calls me 'Mrs. Meredith'? I've been married to Hugo for over a year, and Ian is one of his

closest friends. He dines here at least once a week, and we spend a lot of time at his house. I call him Ian, but he never calls me Nona. Why not? – if it isn't to keep me at a distance, to let me know he disapproves of me. Why not? Tell me that."

"Oh, Nona, don't upset yourself," Caroline exclaimed worriedly.

Judging from the rising pitch of her voice, and now by the way her mouth was working, Nona was on the verge of hysteria.

"Now, listen" – Caroline jumped up from her chair, and went to sit beside her on the sofa – "I'm here now, so you aren't completely outnumbered by diehard Bermudians. Of course I'm working most of the time, but I'm sure we can manage to see something of each other. I know . . . why don't you come and have supper with us at the cabins? I'm sure you'd like Eve and Marie-Laure. I expect you still miss London, don't you, and the girlfriends you had there? There's nothing like a good old feminine natter when one is feeling a bit low."

"Yes, I do miss London terribly," Nona said tremulously. "That was why I was so pleased to find you at the salon this afternoon. Oh, Caroline, could I really spend an evening with you and the other girls? That would be lovely." She bit her lip, and her eyes filled with tears again. "I know most people would envy me living here, and having servants and everything. But sometimes I feel as if I'm stifling. Even the staff don't really approve of me."

It was then, trying to find some way of comforting her, that Caroline made matters worse.

"Does it matter what they think?" she said bracingly. "If I were you, I shouldn't give a pin for their opinion. After all, if Hugo asked you to marry him, *he* obviously

doesn't mind that you're not descended from the colonists. And as long as he —"

But before she could finish, Nona suddenly burst into tears and sprang up from the couch and ran sobbing out of the room.

Caroline's first reaction was to go after her. But halfway to the door she checked. Perhaps a good howl was precisely what Nona needed to relieve her pent-up wretchedness.

In a house like this, swarming with servants, one probably can't even cry in peace, she thought wryly.

Before she had made up her mind what to do for the best, she heard the men coming back.

"I suppose the coffee is cold by now. Sorry we've been rather a long time. I understand from Ian that you're an excellent yachtswoman, Miss Browning," Hugo Meredith said with a smile, as he entered the drawing-room.

"Mr. Dryden flatters me. I'm sure I'm very much a novice compared with him," Caroline said pleasantly.

"Hello, where's Nona got to?" her host remarked, noticing his wife's absence.

"Oh, she had a bad headache so I made her go up to bed. I was just on my way out," Caroline said composedly. "Goodbye, Mr. Meredith. Thank you for a very pleasant evening."

"But you didn't come by bicycle, did you? I thought Nona brought you over in her car? You must let me run you home," he said at once.

"Thank you, but it's such a lovely night I would really prefer to walk back."

"I hardly think —" he began.

"No need for you to turn out, Hugo," Ian Dryden intervened. "It's time I was off myself. I'll see Miss Browning safely home."

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Dryden, but as I said, I shall enjoy the walk," Caroline said firmly.

Somewhat to her surprise, he gave way. "As you wish. Goodnight, Hugo. I hope your wife feels better in the morning."

"Thanks, I expect she will. She gets these migraines occasionally. It will have gone by the morning." Their host accompanied them to the door. "Goodnight, Miss Browning. It's been a great pleasure meeting you. You must come to our next barbecue."

"Thank you, I'd like to. Goodnight." With a cool nod to Ian Dryden, Caroline set off briskly down the drive.

Even if there had not been ornamental lanterns to light the way, the bright spring moon would have given ample light. She kept well to the verge of the drive to avoid being hit by any flying gravel as the car went past.

But when, a few minutes later, the car came up behind her, the yellow beam of the headlamps contrasting with the silvery moonglow, she heard the engine decelerate. And it soon became clear that the car was not going to pass her.

Reaching the tall stone gateposts, mounted with the two carved stone dolphins from which the house took its name, Caroline halted and retraced a couple of yards.

"Do you propose to crawl along behind me all the way back to the Tropicana, Mr. Dryden?" she enquired evenly.

"I will if you persist in being obstinate. It isn't our custom to let girls wander about alone at night." He leaned across the front seat and opened the nearside door. She knew she would have to capitulate but, deliberately, she delayed.

"It's not very late. I've often walked about London after dark," she pointed out. "I can take care of myself, Mr. Dryden."

"I daresay you can – and, if I put you to the test again, you would probably confound me with an accomplished display of judo," he said, with a tinge of irony. "Nevertheless I should prefer to drive you back."

"Very well . . . if you insist." Caroline slid into the passenger seat and closed the door.

"So you and Mrs. Meredith are old friends?" he said, when they had turned out of the gateway. "I should have thought she would have spoken of you at some time. I told her the salon was opening, and that there would be a girl from London on the staff. She did say she had often been to your place in London, but she never mentioned she had a friend there."

So he wanted to probe her relationship with Nona. Caroline stiffened. She might have known he had a reason other than courtesy for wanting to give her a lift.

"Perhaps she didn't think you would be interested," she answered casually.

"Perhaps." He paused, easing off the throttle to negotiate a sharp bend. "Do you also know her mother?"

"Very well," Caroline replied. "She used to be one of my clients. I knew her before I knew Nona."

"An atrocious woman," Ian Dryden said bluntly. "I don't know how Hugo can stand living with her."

Caroline made no comment. She wondered what he was driving at. There must be some strategy behind his remarks.

But having put her on her guard, he chose to drop the subject, and for the next five minutes they drove in silence.

As they were breasting a short but steep hill, he said, "As I've made you forgo your walk, I'll show you something really worth seeing."

It was then that Caroline realized they were following a

different road from the one she had travelled with Nona earlier on. And as they reached the crest of the hill, she gave an involuntary gasp of surprise and delight.

For now, on both sides of the winding moonlit road, lay fields thick with white Easter lilies.

Ian stopped the car and switched off the engine and the headlights. "Quite a sight, don't you think?" he said quietly.

Caroline did not answer. She was reminded of a line by Keats – "Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn." For as the night breeze passed over the fields, the lilies stirred like waves in a silver ocean, and a soft sigh rose and died away. Always moved by anything beautiful, she felt a sudden catch in her throat.

"Heavenly," she said huskily.

And then the moment of enchantment was broken as Ian made a movement and she remembered who was beside her.

"They'll be gone by the end of the week. We export them all over the world. Cigarette?" He offered his opened case.

"I don't smoke, thank you." Caroline's voice was almost curt. If Jake had been with her, she would not have minded showing her feelings. But Ian Dryden was the last person to whom she wanted to expose herself.

After he had lit up, he made no attempt to start the car. Indeed, as he shifted to face her, his arm along the back of the bench-type seat, Caroline had an annoying suspicion that he had used the lily fields as a means of cornering her. Though why he should wish to do so was still beyond her.

"Did Mrs. Meredith really have a headache? Hostesses don't usually retire to bed without seeing their guests off

the premises," he remarked.

So they were back to Nona again. But why? What did he want to know about her that he did not know already? And if he suspected that the two girls were not as close as Nona had made out, why should he think she, Caroline, could satisfy his curiosity?

"No, as a matter of fact she didn't have a headache. She was rather upset about something," Caroline admitted, deciding that it would be a mistake to be too evasive. If he thought she was fencing with him, it would make him more persistent.

"Upset?" he prompted mildly.

"Yes – about this wretched sea-sickness," Caroline explained conversationally. "I gather she has tried all the remedies, but unfortunately none of them work for her. I suppose it makes her feel very out of things, especially when her husband is so keen on sailing."

Surprisingly, he said, "People can't help being sea-sick. It's an unfortunate disability which one has to accept, like a bad head for heights or colour-blindness."

"So I told her, but she seems to think it's something she should be able to control. Perhaps some of the sailing set have been rather scathing. People can be very unkind about weaknesses which they've never experienced themselves."

Ian flicked ash into the dashboard tray. "I'm sure none of Hugo's friends have been unsympathetic."

"Perhaps not intentionally, but I do get the impression that people who live in Bermuda tend to be rather insular and chary of newcomers."

"On the contrary, I would say that Bermudians are exceptionally hospitable people," he countered negligently.

"We have to be – making visitors welcome is the basis of our economy."

"I wasn't talking about the tourists. I meant people coming to live here."

"Did Mrs. Meredith tell you that she had found us unfriendly?" he asked, rather keenly.

He had his back to the moon, so his face was in shadow and she could not see the expression in his eyes. But she sensed the intentness of his gaze, and it made her feel edgy and defensive.

"No, she didn't," she answered untruthfully. "It was merely my own impression."

"An impression formed on the evening of your arrival, perhaps?"

Caroline felt her colour rising, and to conceal it opened her bag. "I don't follow you, Mr. Dryden." She had a silk scarf with her which she draped round her neck.

"Are you cold?" His hand, only inches from her shoulder, moved and touched her slender bare arm. "You don't feel it."

"Perhaps not, but I am," she said shortly. "I should have brought a jacket."

"There's one in the back you can borrow." He reached over the backrest and put a pale-coloured cardigan round her shoulders. It had the kitten-softness of cashmere. Caroline wondered who it belonged to. Elaine Fitzgerald, perhaps.

"Thank you," she said ungraciously. He must have known she had been hinting that she wanted to get back to the Tropicana, but he had deliberately ignored it. And touching her like that, too! He had no right to be so familiar, Caroline thought, bristling.

"We were talking about your arrival," he reminded her.

"Were we? I'm afraid I was so tired after the flight that I don't really remember much about it," she said

stiffly. "Oh, yes . . . Miss Arnold was late coming to meet me. She apologized when she did turn up, and anyway she's an American, not a Bermudian."

"Are you really so obtuse, Miss Browning?" he asked her, with mockery in his voice. "I think you know what I'm talking about."

"Oh, you mean *your* attitude?" she said. "Well, I thought you would prefer to forget that. It didn't bother me unduly."

"Nevertheless I feel I should exculpate myself. I think you were ruffled at the time," he said, on a note of amusement.

Don't abase yourself, Mr. Dryden, Caroline thought acidly.

"The truth of the matter is that young cousin Colin was sent over to England to cut him loose from a rather unfortunate entanglement," he went on blandly. "In fact, considering he's only twenty-two, he's been entangled more often than one would think possible. So when I saw him coming off the plane with yet another pretty girl in tow, I'm afraid I felt a certain exasperation. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings."

"Oh, you didn't do that," she said sweetly. "I assumed you had an unfortunate manner."

And you needn't think that pretty girl bit cuts any ice, she thought witheringly.

Aloud, she added, "Could we go on now? I like to go to bed early during the week."

"By all means." Ian crushed out his cigarette, switched on the engine and put the car in gear.

Glancing at his arrogant profile, Caroline saw that he was smiling to himself, and she wished she had been more caustic. She had never met anyone who could so easily spark her antipathy. He was so maddeningly self-assured.

Even the way he handled a car was oddly irritating.

"To get back to Mrs. Meredith, I think most of her difficulties stem from her mother's presence," he said, when they were on their way again. "If she had any sense, she'd install Mrs. Otway elsewhere."

"She is her mother," Caroline said coldly. "It's not Nona's fault if Mrs. Otway is rather a trying person."

"She'll never stop being so possessive unless Mrs. Meredith asserts herself. She seems to be completely under her mother's thumb — though Mrs. Otway did have the sense to keep in the background until Hugo had committed himself," he said, with unconcealed cynicism.

"I gather you don't approve of the marriage. That must make Nona feel uncomfortable . . . knowing that her husband's best friend doesn't like her," Caroline countered.

"I don't actively dislike her — though I will admit I think Hugo acted precipitately in marrying someone he had only known for a couple of months."

"Falling in love is precipitate. People can't schedule their feelings. Love happens or it doesn't," she answered.

"At your age — perhaps," he agreed. "But there are other incentives to marriage, you know. Loneliness, for example. A man gets used to having a woman about the place. It's a habit that's hard to break."

"If that's your view of marriage, I feel sorry for your wife," she said tightly.

"Have I outraged your illusions?" he asked derisively. "But even at twenty-one, you must have observed that romantic idylls are the exception rather than the rule."

"People who work in beauty salons don't have any illusions, Mr. Dryden. You might be surprised at the things some of our clients confide to us."

"All the same I fancy I detect a core of idealism under the veneer of sangfroid," he said dryly.

To Caroline's relief, they had by now reached the entrance to the hotel. A few moments later he pulled up in front of the cabins.

"Thank you for the lift. Goodnight." Slipping off the borrowed cardigan, she opened the door and stepped quickly out.

"Well, well, what have we here?" Eve said teasingly, as the younger girl joined her on the verandah after the car had purred away into the darkness.

"Phew! — thank goodness that's over." Caroline kicked off her shoes and flopped on to a lounge.
"Where's Marie-Laure? Out with Casanova again?"

Eve nodded. "And where have you been tonight, my little dark horse? Rose said you'd gone off with one of your clients."

Caroline explained what had happened.

"What an evening! I'm exhausted," she ended.

"I'll make some coffee to revive you. It sounds as if you've gotten yourself involved in quite a tricky situation."

"You're telling me! But I felt so sorry for the poor girl that I committed myself to befriending her before I had time to think about it," Caroline said, with a sigh.
"You don't mind if she comes down here for an evening, do you, Eve? I think it might buck her up a bit."

"Of course not, honey. But I should watch my step, if I were you. Maybe she really is having a rough time, but it could be she has a persecution complex. You know . . . the 'nobody loves poor little me' type. What interests me most is how you made out with Ian Dryden. I had lunch with him the day I arrived. He certainly is attractive."

"Do you think so? I think he's detestable," Caroline

said vehemently.

"What? You must be kidding!" Eve expostulated.

"No, I'm not. I don't like him a bit. He's so insufferably pleased with himself."

"He didn't give me that impression," Eve said blankly. "Oh, he's sure of himself. Why not? He's a pretty big man around here. But he didn't strike me as conceited. I thought he had a lot of charm. You can't deny he's good-looking."

"If you like dark men. I don't." Caroline went off to change into a housecoat.

By the time she returned to the verandah, Eve had made the coffee and some sandwiches.

"Do you really not like him?" she asked, apparently still on the same subject. "Well, I guess you wouldn't say so if you didn't. But I can't understand it. I would have thought he would appeal to any girl. I mean, he's so . . . so *masculine*."

Caroline bit into a sandwich. "Men usually are," she said lightly.

"Oh, you know what I mean. Men are men, but some are more male than others. There's something about them that makes you feel . . . well, more feminine, I guess."

"Ian Dryden makes me feel like a specimen under a microscope, or a victim of the Spanish Inquisition. You surely haven't fallen for him, Eve?"

Eve laughed and shook her head. "No, my interest is purely theoretical. Though if I don't have a weekend visitor from New York pretty soon, I might change my mind about that."

"I thought there must be someone in the offing," said Caroline.

"You mean twenty-eight is a ripe old age to be single," Eve said ruefully. "Well, you see I was engaged when I

was younger, and then Don was killed in an automobile accident. It took me quite a while to get over it.”

“Oh, Eve, I’m so sorry. I’d no idea.”

“How should you have?” the older girl said, smiling. “Anyway, it’s all in the past now. One can’t go on grieving for ever. It’s true what they say about time being the great healer. Now when I think of Don I don’t feel sad any more. I remember all the happy times we had.”

“Who is this man in New York?” Caroline asked.

“His name is Peter Austen. He’s a lawyer. Actually I’d only just met him before I took this new job here. But he’s written a couple of times, and in his last letter he said he was thinking of flying down here for some game fishing. So I guess he must be interested.”

“Which reminds me that I have a letter to my parents to finish off,” Caroline said, stirring herself.

After she had showered and put out her clothes for the morning, she climbed into bed and opened her writing case to complete her letter home. But after adding a few sentences to what she had already written, she lay nibbling the end of her pen, her mind reverting to the events of the evening.

And as she remembered the moment when Ian had put his hand on her bare arm, an odd little shiver went through her.

He’s so masculine, Eve had said. It was true: the man did have a strange sort of magnetism about him, Caroline admitted reluctantly. In fact, if she was honest with herself, she had been aware of that aggressive masculinity the very first time she had met him, and every time since then. But Jake was attractive, too, and in him there was not that streak of hardness and ruthlessness which she sensed in Ian Dryden.

He is too autocratic, she thought, frowning. Because

Dryden is an important name here, and he runs the Tropicana, he seems to think he knows what is best for everyone. I bet it was he who had Colin sent to England – and what right has he to say Nona ought to get rid of Mrs. Otway? Well, that may be true, but it's certainly none of his business. Then there's his attitude to me – ordering me to send a cable home, and testing whether I could sail, and forcing me to come back with him tonight. Perhaps he thinks I should be honoured by his attention. I daresay a lot of girls are impressed by that *grand seigneur* manner. But not this one, Mr. Dryden!

The following Sunday, Jake took Caroline down to the enchanted world of the offshore coral gardens. Although she had already had glimpses of this submarine Eden during her previous diving lessons, they could not compare with the wonderful experience of being able to explore the reef at leisure. The strong afternoon sun, shining through five fathoms of pellucid turquoise water, filled the depths with a diffused golden light, and the vivid glowing colours of the corals and little darting fishes made her eyes widen with delight behind the toughened glass plate of her rubber mask. In places, the fantastic structure of the reef was shadowy and mysterious, even faintly sinister. Once, as they passed a deep crevice, Jake touched her arm and indicated the malevolent yellow eyes of a moray eel keeping watch from its dark retreat. But in the clearings among the alleys and arches of coral, they met shoals of translucent angel fish and saw rocks massed with anemones as brilliant as tropical flowers.

They had been rowed out to the reef by a grizzled Bermudian boatman. And when Jake signalled that it was time to surface, Caroline was glad of the old man's assistance in clambering back on board the dinghy.

"It seemed so effortless down there, and yet I'm quite tired now," she admitted, as Jake lifted off her aqua-lung. "How long were we under?"

"How long do you think?" he asked, smiling.

"Half an hour? Forty minutes?" she suggested.

He shook his head. "Not quite a quarter of an hour. But it always seems longer the first time down. Did you enjoy it?"

"It was fabulous," she said dreamily. "The colours . . . the light . . . oh, one can't describe it, can one?"

The boatman took them back to the beach where they had left their clothes, and then rowed off round the point. There was no one else in the cove, and as Caroline towelled her hair and watched the sparkling wavelets advancing and slipping away on the shimmering white sand, she knew that, far from being homesick, she was falling in love with the islands.

After he had dried himself, Jake said he was going to nap for half an hour. Caroline also felt drowsy, and they lay down side by side in the shade of an outcrop of rock and were both soon asleep in the sun.

Caroline was roused by the cry of a sea-bird somewhere high overhead. Half awake, but too lazy to stir, she lay listening to the murmur of the waves. And then something touched her mouth for an instant, and she opened her eyes to find Jake leaning over her. She knew from his expression that he had kissed her.

As he bent to kiss her again, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to put her arms round his neck and respond to his second, less fleeting, kiss. But as she felt his heart start to pound and his fingers tightened on her shoulder, there were stifled giggles from near by, and they looked up to find two children peeping over the rocks at them.

As soon as they had been spotted, the freckled faces disappeared, and Caroline heard the children slithering down the back of the rock and running off together, still giggling.

She sat up and shook back her tangled hair. "We used to do that when we were kids," she said, smiling. "We always spent the summer holidays with my uncle's family. They have a seaside cottage on the East Coast. I remember one year my eldest cousin brought a girl-friend down. We scouted them all over the dunes, poor things. We thought they were so soppy to want to sit about kissing when they could have been shrimping or playing beach cricket."

Jake did not answer. He was absently brushing the dried sand off his legs, a look of troubled preoccupation on his face.

"What's the matter?" Caroline asked quietly. Then: "Jake . . . you aren't married, are you?"

He gave her a look of apparently genuine amazement.

"Good lord, no! What on earth made you think I might be?"

"I don't know . . . sometimes you seem to have something on your mind." She hesitated, colouring slightly. "You aren't bothered about kissing me, are you? I'm not so naïve that I take one kiss as a declaration."

He gave her one of those strange enigmatic looks, and because she suddenly found it difficult to restrain her curiosity about him, Caroline scrambled to her feet.

"Shall we swim?" she said lightly.

But as they walked to the water's edge, she knew a moment's disquiet. In spite of what she had said, that kiss was bound to make a subtle change in their so far uncomplicated relationship.

Am I falling in love with him, as well as with the is-

lands? she asked herself uneasily.

At five o'clock, instead of parting company with her in the grounds of the hotel, Jake suggested that they should go into Hamilton for the evening.

"I'd love to – what shall I wear?" Caroline asked, both surprised and pleased at this unexpected invitation.

For the moment of tension between them had soon passed off once they were in the sea again. And they had spent the rest of the afternoon exploring the rock pools around the point.

"Oh, nothing too fancy. We shan't be going anywhere formal. How long will it take you to change?"

"I'd like to wash my hair. The sea water makes it so sticky. An hour should be enough."

"Right, I'll pick you up at six-fifteen." Jake swung off along the left-hand fork of the path, and Caroline hurried the other way, wondering which of her dresses to wear.

Eve had an electric hair-dryer which she willingly let Caroline borrow. She also pinned up her pleat for her.

"You've gone much fairer since you've been here, but your hair still seems to be in very good condition," she said, as she sprayed a light film of lacquer over the finished hairdo.

"I always use a conditioning shampoo. Thanks, Eve. You've done it beautifully." Caroline untied her plastic make-up cape and unzipped the dress she had decided on, an Emmanuelle Khanh of fluid dull-surfaced crêpe with a petalled collar, a high waistline and a skirt gored to skim her hipbones with an easy flare at the hem.

"That off-beat pale grey looks stunning with your tan, honey," Eve said approvingly. "Any jewellery?"

"Only these." Caroline screwed two hoops of tiny pink shells threaded on silver wire to the lobes of her ears. She

had bought them at the hotel's souvenir boutique, with another pair to send home to her sister-in-law.

Neither Jake nor Caroline had seen each other in anything but beach clothes before, and it was with a slight sense of shock that, at a quarter past six, Caroline saw him swing himself out of a small open car and come up the path in a well-cut tropic-weight suit, his usually tousled light hair now neatly brushed and parted. "Hello, Miss Arnold," Jake gave Eve one of his charming smiles. "Ready, Caroline? I should bring a wrap. It may be cool later on."

"Yes, I have one." Caroline picked up her white wool rajah coat, and they said goodbye to Eve and went down to the car.

Jake made no comment on her appearance, but she could tell he liked the way she looked from the glance he gave her before switching on the engine.

They had supper at a small unpretentious sea-food restaurant overlooking the waterfront of Hamilton Harbour, where the great cruise liners docked and a couple of luxurious ocean-going yachts were berthed.

While they sipped fruit punch, served in coconut husks and drunk through straws, Jake looked out at the shipping in the harbour, giving Caroline the opportunity to study him afresh.

Curiously, his town clothes and groomed look made him seem older, she thought. No, not older precisely, she corrected herself. More worldly – and something else, too. But an exact definition eluded her.

He must have felt her staring at him, for he turned from his contemplation of the harbour and said, "Sorry, I was looking at that darned great yacht and wondering who owned her."

"Some bloated old millionaire, I expect. I'd rather have

that lovely schooner out there.”

But Jake had lost interest in the shipping. “I like your hair that way. You have a pretty neck. Those ear-rings are local, aren’t they? If you like that shell stuff, I’ll introduce you to an old girl who makes it. The shop prices are strictly for the States-side tourists.”

“Yes, these ear-rings were a shocking extravagance, but I just couldn’t resist them,” Caroline said ruefully. “But with room and board provided free, I find I’m quite well off in spite of the high cost of living here. And of course we don’t have to buy any make-up or scent, so that helps as well.”

Jake studied her golden-brown face. “Considering your job, you don’t seem to wear much paint. Not that you need it anyway, but most girls seem to feel naked without it.”

Caroline smiled to herself. It was true that, since she had tanned, she had given up foundations and powders. But it had taken her ten minutes to do her eyes that evening, using a battery of little pots and bottles and fine sable brushes to achieve the misty blue-green shading which Jake did not recognize as an artifice.

They ate crab salad and drank vin rosé, and Jake talked about diving down south in the Bahamas and Jamaica where he had worked for a couple of seasons before coming to Bermuda.

“How long have you been here?” Caroline asked.

They were lingering over their coffee, sitting side by side on a banquette, and Jake was holding her hand on the seat between them.

“Since the beginning of last summer,” he said. “The hotel didn’t have a regular instructor before I arrived, but I managed to sell them the idea.”

“Is it a permanent job?” she asked.

"I suppose so . . . unless I drown one of the customers, or decide to move on. What would you like to do now? Shall we go for a spin round the islands, or shall we find somewhere to dance?"

"Is there anywhere open for dancing? It's Sunday, remember."

"I know a place." He signalled the waiter to bring the bill.

"I'll go and powder my nose." Caroline disengaged her hand and went off to the cloakroom.

While she was washing her hands and retouching her lipstick, she wondered again if she was falling in love with Jake. It had certainly been a very gay and happy evening so far; perhaps the happiest evening she had ever spent with a man. If only she knew more about him.

But I do know all the important things, she thought, staring at her reflection in the mirror. I know we laugh at the same jokes, and that we both love the sea and the beach, and that I liked it when he kissed me. Does it matter where he was born and went to school?

By the time she came out of the cloakroom, the table by the restaurant's illuminated fish tank had been taken. Caroline had to pass it on her way back to Jake, but she would not have noticed the people sitting there if the man had not stood up and barred her way.

"Caroline! Don't you remember me?" he demanded.

"Why, Colin . . . hello. How are you?" she said, in surprise.

"I've been hunting all over the islands for you. I thought you told me you were going to work in a beauty salon. I've been to every one in Hamilton."

Caroline smiled. "You should have asked your cousin where to find me. I'm in the salon at the Tropicana."

"I didn't even know they had one," Colin said blankly.

"I don't go up there much." He remembered the girl he was with. "Oh . . . sorry, Margaret. This is Caroline Browning. We met on the plane from England. Caroline . . . Margaret Burns."

"How do you do?" Caroline smiled at the girl, and had an impression of a pretty doll-like eighteen-year-old.

She turned back to Colin. "I'm afraid I can't stop to chat. We're just leaving." She gestured towards the table by the window where Jake was talking to the waiter.

At the sight of Jake, whom he had evidently not noticed before, a look of shocked disapproval came over Colin's good-looking face.

"What on earth are you doing with him?" he asked sharply.

"He's a friend of mine," Caroline said evenly. "Do you know him?"

"I know *of* him," Colin said tersely. "Look, Caroline —"

"Excuse me, I must go now. Nice to see you again, Colin."

With a nod to Miss Burns, Caroline walked away to join Jake.

"I think perhaps I would rather go for a drive after all," she said, when they were outside the restaurant.

"Anything you say. We'll run over to St. George's Island and have a look at Fort St. Catherine by moonlight," Jake said amenably.

"Do you know Colin Dryden — the boy I spoke to in the restaurant?" she asked, as they set off.

"Only by sight. Shall I put the hood up? I don't want to ruin your hairdo."

"I don't mind a breeze. Is it blowing up for rain?" Caroline looked at the sky where small clouds were scudding about like yachts running before the wind.

"A short squall perhaps, but the hood is weather-proof

if it does rain.”

On the way, Caroline could not help dwelling on Colin's odd reaction to seeing Jake. Why had he scowled, and said “I know *of* him” with that particular emphasis?

Perhaps it was only that, being a member of the august Dryden clan, he regarded professional diving instructors as an inferior form of life. But, if that was the case, surely beauty operatives must come equally low in his estimation.

Thinking it over, she could not escape the conviction that he had had some other reason for viewing Jake with disfavour.

St. Catherine's Fort was a rambling stone edifice on a promontory at the end of a wide bay. By the time they arrived there, the rising wind was whipping quite large breakers against the ramparts of the fort.

“This is where Admiral Sir George Somers had to land in 1609,” Jake said, as he stopped the car. “But it must have been a rougher night than this. He was on his way to Virginia when his fleet was scattered by a storm. His flagship *Sea Venture* struck the reef out there.”

Caroline shivered. Watching the churning sea, she could easily imagine the terrible splintering of timbers as the galleon foundered on the reef, and the cries of the crew and settlers struggling in the turbulent water.

“I'll put the hood up now, in case there's a sudden downpour,” Jake said, getting out.

Caroline would have preferred to drive straight back to Hamilton. Like the weather, her mood had changed. Usually rough seas exhilarated her, but tonight, sitting in Jake's car in the shadow of the gaunt old fortress, she felt nervy and irrationally apprehensive.

It would be dark now, in the golden world of the coral gardens – inky dark, all light and colour extinguished, the

little bright fishes fled away. Now the moray eel would slither out of his cranny, and squids would uncoil their long tentacles, and the vicious barracuda would be nosing through the gloomy deep water.

"I think I'll put my coat on," she said, when Jake came back into the car.

He helped her to slip her arms into the sleeves, and as she fastened the buttons he kept his arm round her shoulders.

"You haven't been round St. George yet, have you?" he said. "It's the original capital of the islands, and really more interesting than Hamilton."

"No, I haven't done any serious sightseeing." Caroline knew he was only making conversation until she had settled herself. She could feel him watching her. In a moment he would turn her face to his.

Earlier, she had hoped that he would kiss her again. But now she did not want it to happen. Not because of any unpleasant personal experience, but from tales other girls had recounted, embraces in parked cars had distasteful associations for her.

Jake shifted his arm round her shoulder so that his hand was close to her neck. Gently caressing the line of her neck, he said, "What's the matter, Caroline?"

His perception startled her. "N-nothing, Jake," she stammered.

"I don't think you like it up here. It is a bit bleak tonight. We'll go back to the hotel and have some rum-and-cokes."

He leaned towards her and gave her a quick kiss on the wing of her right eyebrow. Seconds later the car was in motion.

The Tropicana had a number of bars and cocktail lounges. When they were back at the hotel, Jake took her

to the Reef Room, which was one of the smaller bars with an intimate atmosphere conducive to quiet conversation. There was a radiogram playing, but it was tuned low and the music was dreamy and relaxing.

Jake steered Caroline to a corner couch some distance from the other people there, and presently the barman brought drinks with lemon peel and sprigs of mint floating at the brim of the tall frosty glasses, and a silver entrée dish containing hot shrimp savouries.

"You said this afternoon that you were not so naïve that you attached any major significance to one kiss," Jake said quietly, when there was no one within earshot. "That cuts both ways, Caroline. You don't think I misread that statement, do you? I know what you meant when you said it. I didn't mistake it for an invitation to kiss you any time I liked."

She found herself suddenly shy of him. "No, I know you didn't, Jake. It was just . . . oh, I don't know . . . that place, I suppose. It rather gave me the creeps. I didn't mean to behave as if I thought you were going to pounce at me."

His grin had a wry twist. "I don't make a habit of pouncing. But I would have kissed you again if you'd wanted it too. You're a lovely girl, Caroline."

"I like you very much too, Jake." On impulse, she held out her hand to him.

He gave it a friendly squeeze. "Try some of these shrimp things. They're good."

"Mm . . . delicious," she agreed, taking his cue to steer the conversation back to impersonal topics.

But as they chatted about generalities, she found herself studying his face and once again trying to pinpoint the elusive quality she had first become aware of earlier in the evening.

It struck her suddenly that the lighting in the bar showed up lines on his face which, out of doors in the sun, she had never really noticed before. Indeed, when his face was in repose, and one's attention was not distracted by the wide charming grin and the blueness of his eyes, he had a slightly dissipated air.

Oh, really — Jake dissipated! He must be one of the fittest, healthiest men in Bermuda, she told herself crushingly. Nevertheless, with his fine physique concealed by a lounge suit, he did not look as boyish and active as he always appeared on the beach.

"It's time I saw you home," he said, about eleven o'clock. "Will you be swimming tomorrow morning?"

"Yes, if it isn't too rough."

"The squall will have passed by now. Bad weather never lasts long here." Jake lifted his glass to finish off his drink.

It was then, glancing across the bar towards the doorway, that Caroline saw Ian Dryden. He was standing under the arch of simulated limestone which was supposed to represent the entrance to an underwater cavern. She had no idea how long he had been there, but he was looking directly at her. As their eyes met, he lifted one dark eyebrow, his expression more than usually sardonic.

Then, almost immediately, he turned and disappeared from view.

The next evening, in response to Caroline's invitation, Nona came to supper at the cabins. She had already telephoned Caroline at the salon to apologize for her emotional outburst the night Caroline dined at Dolphins' Wake, and the presence of Eve prevented her from unburdening herself again. Marie-Laure had gone out before Nona arrived. She had had a tiff with Miles Haz-

litt, but had quickly found herself another escort.

Before Nona went home she invited both Caroline and Eve to a private dance at Dolphins' Wake the following weekend.

After she had left, Eve said, "From your description of her house, I should think it will be quite a grand occasion. I'll wear my flame silk. What will you wear, honey?"

"Mm? Oh . . . I haven't made up my mind yet," Caroline said abstractedly.

Her first reaction, when Nona had asked them to the dance, had been to wonder if Ian Dryden was on the guest list.

Even if he is, he won't take much notice of me with all the rest of his set there, she reassured herself.

On the night of the dance, as soon as the last client had left the salon, Eve and Caroline dashed back to the cabins to concentrate on their own looks. Eve was already in a sparkling mood because, that morning, she had received an air-mail letter from Peter Austen in New York. He was taking a week's vacation, and would arrive in Bermuda on Sunday afternoon.

After stripping off her working clothes Caroline had a warm shower followed by an invigoratingly cold one, then towelled herself dry and massaged her knees and elbows and heels with "Spring"-scented Sanchia body lotion.

She was rolling on her tights when Eve tapped at the door and asked how she was getting on.

"Nearly ready. Come on in," Caroline called.

And then, as the American girl walked into the cabin, she looked up and said warmly, "Oh, Eve, you look gorgeous!"

"Do you like it? It's the first time I've worn it." Eve moved to take a final look at herself in the full-length mir-

ror on the door of Caroline's wardrobe.

She was wearing an ankle-length dress of rich red moiré silk, shaped close to her figure, with a high round neck and no sleeves. The narrow skirt was slit on one side to allow for dancing, and the hem of the dress was heavily encrusted with paste rubies and bugle beading.

It was an immensely sophisticated dress, and one which could only have been worn successfully by a willowy brunette. It was also a perfect foil for Caroline's dress of white lace which looked so demure from the front but revealed most of her golden-brown back.

"Well, we ought to knock a few eyes out, even if we haven't any minks and diamonds," Eve said gaily, as they settled themselves in the back of the taxi she had ordered.

The sweep of gravel outside the Merediths' house was already lined with cars when they arrived, and the grounds were lit by strings of Chinese lanterns and concealed floodlights. There was music and laughter on the air. A maid took the two girls up to Nona's bedroom, and they left their wraps among the impressive array of furs cast carelessly over chairs and on the bed. Then they went down the graceful curving staircase to be formally received by Nona and her husband, standing by a great bank of oleanders and roses at the entrance to the brightly lit drawing-room.

"What happens now? Do we infiltrate or do we stand around looking animated?" Eve murmured, as they advanced into the drawing-room.

For with a large number of people arriving at the same time, it had been impossible for Nona to leave her post and perform any introductions. And all the other people present were obviously already acquainted with each other.

"Let's start by fortifying ourselves," said Caroline,

seeing a waiter approaching with a tray of champagne cocktails.

However, before they had time to sip their cocktails, Caroline saw Colin come in with a party of other young people. And as soon as he saw her, he detached himself from his companions and came across to her.

"Caroline! I didn't know you would be here. This is marvellous luck. I say, you look absolutely stunning."

"Thank you." Caroline introduced Eve, and then said, "Thank goodness you're here. We don't know a soul besides Nona Meredith, and we feel like a couple of wall-flowers."

"You must come and join my party." Colin offered an arm to each of them, and led them across the room to where his friends were congregated.

There were four girls and five young men in the group, and while none of the girls looked noticeably enthusiastic about the arrival of two newcomers, the men welcomed them cordially.

A few minutes later, Caroline found herself being led off to dance by a tall thin young man who, like a number of others there, wore black Bermuda shorts and black knee stockings with his white dinner jacket.

"Considering you didn't know anyone when you arrived, it's been darned difficult getting a dance with you," Colin said wryly, when about an hour later he finally managed to put in his claim before several competitors.

"Yes, there does seem to be rather a surplus of men," Caroline agreed smilingly.

"There may be a few extra men, but not that many. You and your American friend are getting some pretty dirty looks from the female contingent," Colin informed her. "We don't usually see many new faces at these affairs, and when a couple of real knockouts appear on the

scene all the chaps perk up." He drew her closer to him, his hand rather hot and sticky against her bare back. Over his shoulder, Caroline could see Eve dancing with a man with a moustache and a bald patch. As they caught each other's eye, Eve winked.

This would be fun if Peter and Jake were here with us, Caroline thought. She felt rather deflated because she knew she looked her best, but there was no one present whose admiration meant anything to her.

As if her thought of Jake had somehow been communicated to him, Colin said, "I've been trying to get in touch with you ever since we bumped into each other last Sunday night. But I'm kept pretty busy at the moment. What on earth were you doing with that Macauley fellow?"

"You asked me that on Sunday, and I told you – he's a friend. Do I gather you don't approve?" she enquired lightly.

"I should have thought you could have found someone less disreputable to take you about," Colin said rather pompously.

"Disreputable? What do you mean?"

"Oh, everyone knows about him. Last summer –"

But before he got any further, he was tapped on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry to break in, but your mother finds she has left her spectacles at home and she wants to play bridge. It won't take you five minutes to get them for her," Ian Dryden said, as they halted.

"Oh, damn, what a nuisance," Colin said irritably.

"Off you go. I'll look after Miss Browning."

As Colin reluctantly released her, Ian slipped his arm round Caroline's waist and swept her back into the dance.

CHAPTER IV

CAROLINE accepted this unexpected change of partners with outward serenity. But as she adapted herself to Ian's lead – he was not a shuffler like Colin – she felt a strange thrust of excitement, not unlike the keyed-up feeling at the start of a sailing race.

After they had passed the local calypso group who were providing the music, Ian said, "I've only just arrived. One of the guests was taken ill this afternoon and had to be rushed off to hospital. It's particularly unfortunate because he and his wife are on a silver wedding trip."

"Not that nice Mrs. Walpole's husband!" Caroline exclaimed concernedly.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"She came in for a treatment and told me all about it – the silver wedding, I mean. Oh, poor thing, how dreadful for her. She was so happy yesterday afternoon. Is his illness very serious?"

"He had a heart attack," Ian said gravely. "I gather it wasn't a severe one, but he'll have to be flown home, and naturally his wife was frightened when he collapsed in the lift after lunch. I've been in touch with the family in Philadelphia, and their son is coming over to take charge of the situation."

"Oh, I am sorry. I liked her. She seemed such a natural, homely kind of person. Not a bit like someone very rich."

"What makes you think the Walpoles are rich?" Ian asked.

"They must be to stay at the Tropicana, and in one of the best suites, too."

"They might have saved up for the trip," he pointed out.

Caroline considered the point. "I shouldn't think so. Surely if that were the case they would have chosen a guest-house. They would have been just as comfortable."

"Do you consider the Tropicana is overrated?" he asked rather dryly.

"No, I didn't mean that. But people who save up for things don't usually *splurge* their money," Caroline said seriously. "The Tropicana is for people to whom money is simply no object. And anyway Mrs. Walpole has a rich woman's clothes and jewellery. It's only her face which is different from most of the other women."

"In what way different?" he asked curiously.

"She looks contented," Caroline said simply. "And she doesn't mind being middle-aged and plump. Most wealthy women hate growing old. Sometimes it's just vanity, because their looks are their chief interest in life. Sometimes they're afraid of losing their husbands. That's why they spend a fortune in beauty salons, and on having their faces lifted and starving themselves at health hydros."

"I thought Sanchia cosmetics were supposed to work wonders?" he said, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes. "Are you admitting yourself a charlatan, Miss Browning?"

"Not at all," she answered, smiling. "We don't claim any miracles. All we do promise is to make women look their best."

"Well, you and Miss Arnold are certainly excellent advertisements for the firm's products. Is Miss Gautier also here?"

"No, Marie-Laure had another engagement," Caroline explained.

They finished the dance in silence, and without conver-

sation to distract her, Caroline found herself increasingly conscious of his nearness, and the light but firm pressure with which he held her.

When the music ended, he said, "It's getting rather close in here. Shall we stroll round the garden before the supper break?" And, slipping his hand under her elbow, he steered her towards the doors opening on to the terrace.

There were people strolling about all over the lawns, but Ian guided Caroline to a grass walk leading away from the main part of the garden. It was sheltered by a tall pittosporum hedge, the dark foliage clustered with waxy white blossoms of heady fragrance.

"I thought you might like to see the old quarry garden," he said, as they passed under the shadow of a hedge, their feet making no sound on the thick turf. "All the great houses in Bermuda were built with stone quarried on the site. It's still done today in some cases."

At the end of the walk they came to a high stone wall with a circular opening in it, and luxuriant masses of coralita vine and plumbago spilling over the top.

"This is called a moongate. You see them all over the islands. You're supposed to wish as you step through," Ian told her, still holding her arm.

"I don't think there's anything I want," Caroline said lightly.

As they entered the moonlit garden and went down a winding flight of steps thickly bordered with spider lilies, she was intensely aware that they had the place to themselves. She could no longer hear the murmur of voices and drifts of muted laughter.

At the foot of the steps, the floor of the quarry had been paved round a raised pool. Water lilies and lotus blossoms floated on the quiet surface. There was no wind that night, but as always on the islands, the sound of the

sea was a continuous sighing in the distance.

"Shall we sit down? Someone has put some cushions out." Ian indicated a carved stone seat facing the pool.

There were amphorae filled with plants and weathered pieces of sculpture set about on ledges of hewn rock all over the garden. Seating herself on the bench, which was just wide enough to take two people, Caroline wondered why he had brought her here. But, perhaps because of the two glasses of champagne she had drunk, she did not feel as defensive as she had that other night in his car.

She was even prepared to admit that, until he arrived, she had been finding the dance disappointingly dull. Now he was present the evening had some stimulus. Whatever else he might be, Ian Dryden was certainly not a bore.

"It's extraordinary how women's clothes change their appearance," he said, crossing his long legs. "Tonight you look so ethereal that anyone seeing you from the moongate could mistake you for a ghost, Miss Browning. That's a very pretty dress you're wearing."

"Thank you, Mr. Dryden," she said primly. "Do you mean I normally strike you as a hearty hockey-playing type?"

"Hardly that, but you must be in pretty good trim to swim before breakfast and run up those steps from the beach," he answered, with amusement. "As we're both off duty, shall we be informal and use our first names?"

"Very well. How did you know I swim before breakfast?"

"I'm usually in my office by seven. I sometimes see you come haring up the steps in your beach kit."

"Oh, do you?"

Had he also observed that she often had a companion? she wondered. If Colin disapproved of her association with Jake, presumably his cousin would too. She remem-

bered the sardonic look Ian had given her the night he had seen her with Jake in the Reef Room.

"You start work very early," she said.

"I like to have the afternoon free," he said casually.

There had been a time when Caroline would have reacted to this remark by thinking somewhat acidly that it must be very agreeable to work only when one pleased. But from various snippets of information she had gleaned from the regular hotel staff, she knew now that Ian was no mere figurehead enjoying a comfortable sinecure. He really did keep a close rein on the management of the Tropicana, as was witnessed by his personal attention to the Walpole crisis. And, according to her informants, he had trained for his position by working in famous hotels in London, Zurich and Paris, and would have stayed in Europe longer but for the sudden death of his father.

"What does Colin do?" she asked. "He's never told me."

"Probably because he regards work as a deplorable incursion on his other pursuits," Ian said dryly. "He is a public relations assistant with the Bermuda Broadcasting Company. He wasn't interested in coming into the hotel business. Unfortunately my uncle died when Colin was still at school, and his mother tends to be too indulgent."

A frowning which I'm sure you do your best to counteract, Caroline thought.

Aloud, she said, "Nona tells me that some Bermudian families are descended from the very first colonists. Did your forebears come over on the *Plough*?"

"No, I'm afraid the origins of the Drydens are decidedly dubious," he said easily. "My great-grandfather was a Cornishman with a Spanish wife. He came to Bermuda at the beginning of the American Civil War, and made a great deal of money running the Federal blockade

for four years. A ship's master could clear about five thousand dollars for the round trip to North Carolina, but of course the risks were high too. Compared with the Merediths and Fitzgeralds, the Drydens are rather shady arrivistes."

So that is why he's so dark, Caroline thought. The Spanish strain has come out in him.

"If you're interested in the history of the colony, I can lend you some books on the subject," he went on. "But perhaps you don't care for reading."

"I used to read a lot at home, but I haven't done much lately," she conceded. "I've been spending all my spare time in the sea."

"Learning skin-diving, I believe?" Ian remarked, without expression.

"Yes, it's fascinating – even more fun than sailing."

Caroline waited for him to make some barbed comment on her friendship with Jake. But he only said, "Have you tried any spear-fishing yet?"

"Not yet. I've only just graduated to Scuba. Mr. Macauley doesn't believe in rushing things."

Ian turned his head towards her. By moonlight his strong-boned face was the colour of rough-cast bronze, the high-bridged nose matching the decisive lines of chin and jaw.

"With reference to skin-diving, you mean," he said negligently.

"What else?" Caroline rose from the bench and moved away to sit on the rim of the pool. By leaning slightly forward she could see her reflection in the water. She did look rather wraith-like, her hair a pale bell round her face, her features indistinct, the white lace of her dress as insubstantial as a shower of sea-spray.

"I thought perhaps he might be instructing you in

other accomplishments," Ian said, from the bench. "Don't overbalance."

Caroline turned to face him. "What other accomplishments?"

"He's also an expert on water-skis. Didn't you know?"

Had he really meant that? Somehow she did not think so.

"I know very little about him, except that *he* knows almost everything about the reefs," she said calmly. "Shouldn't we be getting back?"

She had left her evening bag on the bench, and he picked it up and handed it to her. She went up the worn limestone steps a little way ahead of him, stopping at the top to take a last look at the quarry garden.

As Ian joined her there, he said, "Perhaps I should mention that wishing is not the only custom attaching to moongates. If a girl stands inside the gate's shadow, her companion is entitled to kiss her."

Caroline moved so swiftly that she almost tripped over the threshold.

As he shot out a hand to steady her, Ian said blandly, "Don't panic. I didn't intend to demonstrate. But young Colin might, given the chance."

"I thought you made it your business to steer him clear of strange girls," she said, recovering herself.

"It depends on the girls. I don't think he's likely to make a fool of himself with you, Caroline."

"I'm not quite sure what you mean — but it doesn't sound very flattering," she said coolly.

"Merely that I don't think you're particularly interested in Colin."

"I hardly know him," she countered.

"Well, if you want to pursue the acquaintance, you have my blessing," he said benignly.

If they had not been approaching the terrace, Caroline might have responded to this piece of calculated provocation with a suitably pithy riposte. But she managed to restrain herself.

"Ian! — so you *are* here. Someone said something about your being detained at the hotel."

As they reached the shallow terrace steps, they were joined by Elaine Fitzgerald on the arm of an elderly man.

"Hello, Elaine. Good evening, sir. Yes, I arrived rather late," Ian explained.

He introduced Caroline to them. The man was Elaine's father.

"We've already met," Elaine said coolly, her tawny eyes appraising Caroline's dress.

Her own dress was a breathtaking creation of pale water-green silk, the bodice intricately embroidered with hundreds of tiny shimmering sequins. In a company of people all of whom were tanned to varying degrees, her beautiful shoulders were arrestingly white. Caroline guessed that she had the sensitive skin of most naturally auburn-haired women, and wondered how she managed to protect it from even a mild degree of suntan.

"Oh, you mean the morning you picked me up off the *Mermaid*?" Ian asked.

"No, Miss Browning attended to me at the salon one day," Elaine told him. "Actually it was the day you took me to the Websters' party. Don't you remember? I did mention it."

"Yes, so you did." He glanced down at Caroline and his mouth twitched slightly. "I remember now."

For some seconds, Caroline could not think why the recollection should amuse him. And then she remembered that was the day she had told Elaine he had very little authority over the salon staff. Obviously the older girl

had reported the remark to him, and he was recalling it now.

"Ian, could you run me home tonight? Daddy has to leave early because he's flying down to Nassau tomorrow morning, and my own car has broken down," Elaine went on.

"Of course – with pleasure," he said, at once. "Shall we go in to supper now?"

It was in the supper room that Caroline became separated from him. Groups of people were mingling and intermingling round the two long splendidly laid out buffet tables, and presently Ian was drawn into conversation with someone she did not know, and she was reclaimed by one of her earlier partners, a man called Gavin whose surname she had not caught.

Within half an hour, Caroline found herself at one end of the crowded room, with Ian's tall figure away at the other end.

Presently she managed to slip upstairs to touch up her make-up and comb her hair, and when she came down again Colin was lying in wait for her.

"I'm sorry I had to desert you. Have you had something to eat? Good: then come and dance again. I've hardly had a minute alone with you."

"What about the girls in your party? Should you be deserting them?" Caroline asked.

"Oh, we weren't paired off or anything. They're a crowd I've known since we were all kids. We just arrived in a bunch," he said, dismissing them. "Caroline, can I take you home when this breaks up?"

"I'm with Eve," she reminded him.

"She's going home with Barney Walsh. I heard him ask her, and said I'd look after you. You don't mind, do you?"

"It seems to be all arranged," Caroline said mildly.

She had a suspicion that Colin was the type who would take for granted that she would kiss him goodnight, moon-gate or no moon-gate, but she had no doubt she could cope with him. And besides, she wanted to know what he had been going to say about Jake before Ian interrupted them.

Colin monopolized her for most of the remainder of the evening, and she could not help noticing that Ian danced almost exclusively with Elaine. Against her will, she found herself repeatedly staring at them, and pondering the nature of their relationship. Since they had probably known each other from early childhood, it was difficult to judge whether the palpable intimacy between them was merely the natural result of lifelong friendship or if it indicated an even closer relationship. But surely, if they're on the brink of an engagement, Elaine wouldn't have to ask Ian to take her home? They would have come here together, Caroline reasoned.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Colin tucked her into his mini-car, and although Caroline had often stayed later at dances, on this occasion she was not sorry to leave before the festivities were completely over. She was looking forward to a cup of tea and to comparing notes with Eve.

"Would you like to come sailing tomorrow? A crowd of us are getting up a party and going over to one of the picnic islands. You could crew for me," Colin invited, as they drove down the drive in a procession of other cars.

"Oh, I can't tomorrow, Colin. I'm already booked," she told him.

"With Jake Macauley?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes, he's taking me Scuba-diving."

"Can't you chuck him? You'll have a lot more fun with us."

"Wouldn't that be rather rude?" she suggested.

He did not reply for some moments, and then he said impatiently, "You can't go on running around with that fellow, Caroline. He's thoroughly bad lot. Ask anyone."

"Why does your cousin employ him, then?" she asked. "He knows I have lessons with Jake, and he hasn't warned me about him."

"Does Ian know that you've been out with Macauley in the evenings?"

"I think so."

"Oh, well, Ian's a rum bloke. One never knows which tack he'll take. Sometimes he lays down the law on things which are none of his business, and sometimes he couldn't care less what people do," Colin said, shrugging. "I suppose he can't very well pry into your affairs. Though he's certainly stuck his oar into mine plenty of times," he added resentfully.

"You still haven't told me what Jake is supposed to have done," she reminded him. "Do come to the point, Colin."

"The point is that Macauley isn't much better than a gigolo," Colin informed her tersely.

"Jake – a gigolo?" Caroline expostulated. She was not sure what she had expected him to say, but this accusation struck her as laughable. Apart from the fact that it was such an antiquated term for anyone of their age to use, it conjured an image of a smarmy Latin type with patent leather hair and pointed shoes dancing the tango at a 1930's *thé dansant*. Jake, with his nice brown face and engaging grin, was the very antithesis of such an image.

"Oh, really, Colin, what rubbish! Gigolos went out with tea-gowns and tennis flannels," she said laughingly.

"You sound like somebody's grandfather."

"I'm glad you find it so amusing," he said huffily. "How else would you describe a type who chases after older women? Mrs. Morell must have been forty at least."

"Who is Mrs. Morell?" Caroline asked.

"She rented the house next to ours for the whole of last summer. She was recovering from an illness or something. I don't know all the details. But she was obviously pretty well-to-do, and she was on her own here. I suppose she was either a widow or a divorcee. Anyway, she hadn't been in Bermuda a couple of weeks before she and Macauley were as thick as thieves. They went everywhere together, even to the Mid-Ocean Club where you have to have an introduction to get in. The whole colony was talking about them. Mother said it was scandalous."

"What did your cousin say?" Caroline asked.

"Oh, he just shrugged and said it wasn't his concern what Macauley did in his free time, and that Mrs. Morell was old enough to run her own life. He seems to quite like Macauley. I told you Ian was an odd type."

"Well, I still don't think you're justified in calling Jake a gigolo," Caroline said firmly. "What was Mrs. Morell like to look at?"

"I suppose she was fairly attractive . . . for her age. She had a good figure, and she slapped on plenty of make-up. She looked like an ex-chorus girl. I remember some of the girls saying she was the sort of woman who wore diamonds with a swimsuit."

Yes, I can imagine what the girls would say about her, Caroline thought dryly.

One needed only a slight acquaintance with the members of Colin's set to realize that they were the kind of supercilious young men and women who idled through

life cushioned by their parent's affluence and social position, and whose attitude to all outsiders was one of preconceived dislike or patronage.

As for the notorious Mrs. Morell, she might have been flamboyant and lacking in taste, but she had probably had a good deal more kindness and tolerance than many of the members of the colony's exclusive clubs.

Aloud, Caroline said, "Jake Macauley is older than you are, and a woman of forty isn't exactly ancient, you know, Colin."

"Perhaps she was more than that. Her hair was that frightful brassy blonde, and she had a laugh you could hear half a mile away," Colin said scathingly. "Anyway, she was a lot older than he is, and *he* didn't pay for all that wining and dining at hotels every night."

"How do you know? He may have a private income."

"Oh, come off it, Caroline. You don't really believe that, do you? The chap is a glorified loafer. Teaching skin-diving isn't most people's idea of a career."

Inwardly Caroline conceded that there was a good deal of force in this last statement. She had thought the same thing herself some time ago. But she did not admit this to Colin.

Instead she said lightly, "It may not lead to fame and fortune, but it is a happy, healthy sort of life. A lot of people would envy him. Anyway, I agree with your cousin – the way Jake chooses to live is entirely his own concern."

"You mean you'll still go about with him?" Colin protested.

"If he asks me to," Caroline said calmly. "After all, assuming all the gossip about him is true, *I*'m not a rich widow."

"He may have other designs on you," Colin said.

She let this pass and, as they reached the hotel gates,

directed him to take the turning off the main driveway.

"I wish you were as keen to come out with me," he said huffily, as he braked the car near the cabins.

"Why don't you telephone me at the salon?" she suggested. "Goodnight, Colin. Thank you for bringing me back." And with that she slipped out of the car and ran up the path.

Eve's light was on, and Caroline found her already undressed and busy cleaning off her make-up.

"I hope I didn't do the wrong thing, agreeing to come back with Mr. Walsh so that Colin Dryden could bring you home?" the American girl said, as Caroline stepped out of her shoes and sank on to the end of her divan. "He didn't get fresh, did he? He looks the type who might."

"He may have had it in mind, but on the way back we had a bit of a tiff," Caroline said, yawning. "I quite liked him coming over on the plane. But now he seems rather spineless. It was a pretty dud evening, don't you think?"

Eve nodded. "I can't say I had a swinging time either. I guess I've reached the age when a quiet dinner *à deux* is more my style. But I enjoyed the dresses. Did you notice that fair girl in blue chiffon, and the redhead in pale green silk? She was dancing with Mr. Dryden most of the evening."

"Yes, I noticed. You'd better get some rest if you're going to look fresh tomorrow," Caroline advised. Suddenly she did not want to talk about the dance any more.

But although she was physically tired, it was a long time before she was able to sleep herself. Yet it was not Colin's allegations about Jake which made her shift restlessly about on the comfortable divan. Try as she would, she could not close her mind to thoughts of Ian Dryden and the interlude in the moonlit quarry garden.

The following afternoon Caroline set out for another Scuba-diving session with Jake. She left Eve getting ready to go to the airport to meet Peter Austen. Marie-Laure was reclining on the verandah, painting her nails and looking sulky. She had not enjoyed her date the night before and, since breakfast, had taken the attitude that she had been deliberately excluded from the dance at Dolphins' Wake. Both Eve and Caroline were out of patience with her, particularly Eve, who was so fastidiously neat herself that the French girl's untidiness was rapidly becoming the cause of serious friction between them.

Considering the jumble-sale state of her room, it was amazing that Marie-Laure always contrived to look well groomed. What exasperated Eve was that the clutter was constantly overflowing to the verandah and the laundry room. Instead of rinsing out her smalls every night as the other girls did, Marie-Laure accumulated a mound of discarded underclothes and then washed them all at once, when the spirit moved her, and took over every inch of the drying rack. When she had finished doing her nails, she would probably leave her manicure box on the verandah table, and it would be up to Eve or Caroline to return it to her room.

Jake and the boatman were waiting for her when Caroline reached the cove beyond the headland. She ran across the sand to the place where the boat was beached.

"Am I late?" she asked anxiously.

"No, right on time." Jake was checking the air pressure in the canisters, but he glanced up and smiled at her. "What time did you have lunch?"

"Early – about twelve. Scrambled eggs and a glass of milk," Caroline told him.

On Sundays the girls did not have any meals in the hotel, but cooked for themselves in the kitchenette.

Before they went out to the reef, Jake made her practise "ditching", which meant diving to the sea-bed, shedding her Scuba unit, surfacing, and then diving and putting it on again.

Caroline could not see the point of this exercise, but he explained that it was good training in case she ever had to rescue a fellow diver who was trapped in some way and running out of air.

"In the actual event you would have to cut your straps, transfer your air supply to him and then surface and get hold of another unit for yourself," he told her. "Then the other chap could sit tight underwater and wait for you to come back and cut him free. It would be no use trying to free him at once if he was down to his last pound of air."

"Oh I see. Well, let's hope it never happens. I'm sure I should be all thumbs in a real emergency."

"That's why it's so important to practise these things," said Jake. "Then if a crisis does crop up you can deal with it without getting in a flap."

Later, when they were relaxing on the beach, Jake dozed off as he had done the previous Sunday. But Caroline sat with her back against a boulder, thoughtfully sucking a peppermint, her eyes on his sleeping face.

Somehow she could not believe that his relationship with Mrs. Morell had been as ugly as Colin implied. Perhaps Jake was a bird of passage. Perhaps there were aspects of his life which justified censure. But no one would ever convince her that he was wholly disreputable. The more she knew of him, the more she was inclined to believe that there was something in his past which had made him cut adrift from commitments and responsibilities. But that was not to say that he had also discarded all scruples and self-respect. He might be a drifter, but she felt sure he was not a sponger.

She had expected him to ask her to spend the evening with him but, as so often before, they parted company in the hotel grounds, and Jake did not mention seeing her on the hotel beach the following morning.

That week was a rather solitary one for Caroline. Every morning she swam by herself and saw no sign of Jake. And Eve spent all her free time in the company of Peter Austen, which included having lunch with him in the hotel's main dining-room. She had introduced him to the other girls when he came to the cabins to take her out on Monday night. Afterwards Marie-Laure wrinkled her nose and said she could not see why Eve had been so eager for his visit — though of course at her age one could not be too discriminating.

"I like him very much," Caroline said, a shade tartly.

Although the American attorney was by no means good-looking with his thin deeply creviced face and greying sandy hair, she had liked his quiet pleasant voice and the directness of his grey eyes behind a pair of dark-rimmed glasses.

The weekend came round, and Caroline decided to spend Sunday sailing. Since Jake had not been in touch with her, presumably he would not expect her to turn up at their usual diving rendezvous.

After breakfast on Sunday morning, she packed a sandwich lunch, borrowed one of the hotel bicycles and rode over to Mr. Cooper's boatyard to hire the *Mermaid* again. It promised to be the hottest day since her arrival in Bermuda, but there was a fresh wind blowing and, knowing how quickly squalls could blow up out of an apparently clear sky, she had taken the precaution of bringing a sweater. By ten o'clock she was on the water.

She spent the morning pottering in and out of little bays, and just when she was beginning to feel hungry she

noticed a small island some way offshore on the port beam. Closer investigation suggested that it was one of the picnic islands Colin had mentioned to her, and she decided to have lunch there.

As she approached the island, she spotted a mooring buoy. She manoeuvred the *Mermaid* across the wind, eased the sheets to reduce speed and then turned smartly into the wind with the buoy on her starboard bow. It was a bit of a scramble heaving it inboard and making fast and then hauling in the loose sheets, but she managed it.

Luckily she had had the forethought to wrap her lunch pack in several layers of polythene, so the contents were undamaged in the business of getting ashore.

She was sitting on the sand in her swimsuit, munching a tomato sandwich and thinking how much Joey and Rob would envy her if they knew where she was at that moment, when she was suddenly aware of being watched. It was a momentarily unpleasant sensation on an island she had thought deserted, but when she turned her head she found a small coloured boy, about seven or eight years old, standing a little way behind her.

"Hello," she said, smiling. "Where did you spring from?"

The boy did not answer, but gave her a mischievous grin.

It seemed to Caroline that he was eyeing her lunch pack rather suggestively. She said, "Are you hungry too? Have a sandwich?" and held one out to him.

The child accepted it, retreated two or three paces and dropped cross-legged on to the sand, his round dark eyes never leaving her face.

"What's your name?" Caroline asked presently, amused by the intensity of his scrutiny.

But he did not answer, and an oddly embarrassed ex-

pression flickered over his small brown face.

Puzzled, Caroline passed him another sandwich. Was he shy? He did not seem so.

When the sandwiches were finished, and she had shared a bar of chocolate with him, the boy scrambled up and beckoned her to follow him.

The centre of the island was thick with overgrown bushes, and to reach the far side they had to go round by way of the shoreline. The interior of the place probably covered nearly an acre.

On the western side, the beach was fringed with rock pools, and, beyond the shallows, coral banks showed up as patches of deep blue water. A palm-thatched open-sided hut had been built on the widest part of the beach.

There was no sign of a boat anywhere, and Caroline could not make out how the boy had reached the island. Surely he could not have swum there? Then, as she was about to ask him, he clutched her arm and pointed towards the coral banks. And, shading her eyes from the sunlight, she saw the outline of a man swimming. He was wearing a snorkel, the air tube breaking the surface like a miniature periscope.

"Your father?" Caroline asked.

But the boy was running off to the hut.

He returned a few moments later and proudly displayed a large shinningly new clasp knife of the kind Caroline remembered her brothers treasuring at his age. It had three blades and gadget for opening bottles.

"I say, what a beauty!" she said, looking suitably impressed.

The boy beamed from ear to ear. He pointed towards the man in the water, then tapped his chest.

It was this mimed explanation of who had given him the knife that made Caroline realize why he had not an-

swered her questions. The boy was deaf.

A splashing in the shallows made her glance over her shoulder, and then give a startled exclamation. For in spite of his deeply tanned skin, the man wading towards them was not a brown Bermudian. It was Ian Dryden.

"Caroline! What are you doing here?" he asked, looking equally surprised.

Before she could answer, the boy began to gesticulate. Ian watched him attentively, at intervals nodding his head. Then he in turn made some signs, and the boy scampered off to the hut again.

"He's going to make tea. Excuse me a moment, will you? I must deal with this." He glanced down at the good-sized lobster he was holding in his gloved left hand. His snorkel and another gauntlet were tucked under his arm, and his mask was pushed back over his wet black hair.

When he had left her, Caroline got to her feet and paddled along the water's edge. Ian was the last person she had expected to meet today, and she was conscious that her hair was wildly tangled from the morning's sailing, and that she had long since lost any trace of lipstick. But she had left her bag in the care of Mr. Cooper, so it was not possible to make any quick repairs to her appearance.

"You're moored at the old buoy, I suppose?" Ian said, when he came back from the hut.

She nodded.

"How did you come across? I don't see a boat anywhere."

"My cat is laid up this weekend. We rowed over and beached at the north end," he explained, with a gesture towards the part of the island Caroline had not yet investigated.

"Oh, I see. I've never sailed a catamaran. Do you prefer them?" she asked.

"They're much faster than single-hulled yachts, but they're not so manoeuvrable, and it's the devil's own job to right them if they capsize. Ah, here comes Benjy with the tea. You don't mind tin mugs, I hope?"

"Not at all," Caroline said politely.

The tea was made with condensed milk, a flavour which always reminded her of childhood. Sometimes, in hot weather, she and the two younger boys had been allowed to sleep in a tent rigged up in the garden. They had made tea in a billy can and cooked sausages and fried bread in a discarded frying-pan over a smoking fire.

Benjy had a bottle of fizzy stuff to drink. After opening it with the gadget on his new knife, he wandered off to dangle his feet in a rock pool. In spite of his disability, he was obviously a happy youngster. Caroline wondered what he was doing in Ian's company.

The wind was dropping now, and in the lee of the island's vegetation, the temperature was well up in the eighties. The glare did not seem to trouble Ian, but Caroline was glad she had a pair of smoked glasses with her.

She put them on. "What a scorching day! There'll be some red faces in the salon tomorrow."

"Yes, it's a regular Sally Bassett," he agreed. Then, noticing her look of enquiry, "Haven't you heard that expression before? It's quite common in Bermuda. Sarah Bassett was burned at the stake during the witch-hunts in the seventeenth century. According to the stories, she was executed on an exceptionally hot day, and heatwaves are still referred to as Sally Bassett weather."

"I see . . . how grim." Caroline shivered slightly. To change the subject, she said, "I didn't realize at first that Benjy couldn't hear what I was saying. Has he always been deaf?"

"Yes, there's congenital damage to the middle ear. It

can never be cured, but he isn't as cut off from the rest of the world as he would have been some years ago. He attends special classes for the deaf, and we've all picked up enough sign language to be able to communicate with him."

"We?" Caroline queried.

"My mother is an invalid, and Benjy's parents run the house for us," Ian explained. "He usually tags along when I come over to the island. It's a change for him, and he's no trouble."

"It's quite a large island. I'm surprised it hasn't been built on. But I suppose the Government want to preserve some parts of the colony in their natural state."

"This isn't Government property. It belongs to us," Ian said casually.

She gave him a dismayed glance. "Then I'm trespassing. I'm sorry . . . I had no idea."

"It doesn't matter. There isn't a notice saying 'Keep Off.' We don't mind who comes here as long as they don't leave beer cans all over the place."

"All the same, I'm sure you prefer to have it to yourself. Well . . . thanks for the tea."

She was already on her feet when he said, "You're marooned. You don't want to be becalmed for an hour, do you?"

It was true, Caroline realized. The breeze had completely died away. The sea was as smooth as glass.

"We get these lulls sometimes in the early afternoon. It'll freshen again about three," Ian told her. His mouth twitched slightly. "Don't look so perturbed, Caroline. I'm aware that you find my company something of a strain, but you can always go off and swim if it becomes too much for you."

Caroline bent to remove one of her beach shoes. "Why

do you say that?" she asked evenly, shaking the sand out of it.

"Isn't it true?" His tone was amused.

"I was not aware of it," she said, with a slight shrug.

He raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Well, I won't call your bluff for the moment. Later, perhaps." And he sprang to his feet and signalled to Benjy to join them.

The three of them swam together for over an hour, plunging off a natural groyne of rocks to see who could retrieve the greatest number of coins from the sea bed in a single dive, and playing a hilarious game of water-ball which came to an abrupt end when the ball suddenly burst a seam and deflated like a pricked balloon.

After they had rested on the rocks for a few minutes, Benjy had a new idea.

"He wants to play catch. Are you up to it?" Ian asked.

"I think so." Caroline was still panting from their previous exertions.

"In you go, Benjy." Ian gave the boy a playful shove into the water. "You'll find it's quite a job to grab him," he told Caroline. "He shoots about like a young squid."

"Oh, to be eight years old again!" She shook back her streaming hair and took a header after him.

As Ian had warned, catching Benjy was not easy. He was as supple as an eel and twisted out of her reach half a dozen times before she was at last able to seize him.

"Your turn now," Ian called.

Treading water, laughing and gasping from the strenuous chase after the boy, Caroline turned her head and saw him standing on the rocks, his hands on his hips, his tall figure outlined against the deep blue sky.

And in the moment before his arms swung up for the plunge, a queer kind of panic seized her and she looked wildly about for some way of escaping from him. He came

for her under the water and, when he was almost on her, she drew a deep breath and dodged him by jack-knifing sideways. She knew he would have to surface to gulp down air, and that the only way to evade him was by using young Benjy's tactics.

But the next time she dodged his hand brushed against her leg and she had to somersault down to the sandy floor. And then, as she twisted over and kicked herself upwards, she saw his dark face close to hers, and his arms clamped round her.

It was probably no more than ten seconds before their heads broke the surface of the sea. But it was long enough for Caroline to experience a sensation of total helplessness – and something even more frightening.

As soon as they surfaced, he released her. But as her hands slipped from his glistening shoulders – she must instinctively have clutched at him, or attempted to push him away – her heart was pounding so violently that she felt giddy and weak.

Then Benjy came bobbing up near them, flailing his skinny brown arms to incite Ian to chase him, and Caroline swam slowly back to the beach.

By the time they joined her, there was sufficient breeze for her to say, "I think I'll be getting back now."

"Would you mind giving us a lift? It will save me rowing against the current," Ian said.

This was something she had not bargained for. "What about your boat?" she asked.

"I'll bring her to the mooring and put her on a tow line."

"Very well . . . I'll meet you round there." Picking up her sand-shoes, Caroline walked away from him.

But although she was outwardly composed, her thoughts were in wild confusion. For now she could no

longer deny the strength of Ian's attraction for her.

And I knew it all along, she thought miserably. From that very first day at the airport . . .

It was her suggestion that Ian should take the helm going back to the boatyard. She did not want him to have the opportunity to watch her, perhaps to detect that she was upset.

With the *Mermaid* fast to her buoy once more, they all transferred to the rowing boat to get back to the jetty.

Then Caroline picked up her bag from Mr. Cooper's office, smiled goodbye to Benjy, managed a tighter smile for Ian and mounted her bicycle.

When she got back to the cabins, she had a warm shower to rinse the salt out of her hair and off her skin. Then she put a clean cotton frock on, made herself a pot of coffee and took it out on the verandah. She was still stretched out on a lounge when, an hour later, Eve returned from a deep-sea trolling trip with Peter.

"Whew, I'm whacked! I've been wrestling with a wahoo," she exclaimed, flopping into a chair.

"What in the world is a wahoo?" Caroline asked. "Some kind of fish, I presume."

"That's right . . . and what's more I caught him," Eve informed her triumphantly. "*And* he weighs sixty pounds. I think I'll have him stuffed or embalmed, or whatever it is they do to fishing trophies, and hang him over our mantel in one of those long glass cases."

It was some seconds before the significance of this remark registered with Caroline. Then she sat up with a jerk.

"Eve! You don't mean—?"

"Yes, Peter's asked me to marry him, and he's wiring his office that he won't be flying back until Wednesday, and tomorrow we're going to choose a ring," Eve told

her, all in one breath. "Oh, Caroline, I'm so happy!"

Caroline was so delighted by this news that for the moment she forgot her own problems.

"I suppose this means you'll be leaving as soon as possible?" she said presently.

"Well, we haven't had time to make any definite plans, but I shouldn't think we'll get married until the fall," Eve said reflectively. "Apart from my contract with Sanchia, there's the problem of finding somewhere to live. Peter's present apartment is very small, so it wouldn't be too convenient, even temporarily. And we're not like a younger couple who don't want a family right away. We'd both like to have a couple of kids, and as I'm twenty-nine next birthday, the sooner we get started the better. I guess a big old house in the country would be ideal for us, but they aren't too easy to find."

On Monday morning, Caroline arrived at the salon to find a parcel waiting for her. It had been given to the receptionist by one of the hotel pageboys and was unstamped with only "Miss Browning" written on the wrapping. So until she opened it, Caroline was mystified. But when she found it contained several books about the history of Bermuda, she realized it had come from Ian.

For an instant, a warm glow of pleasure filled her. Then she told herself not to be a fool. The fact that he had remembered their conversation in the quarry garden had no particular significance.

At lunchtime Peter and Eve invited her to have dinner with them, overruling her protests that they would surely prefer to be alone on their last-but-one evening together. Marie-Laure was also asked to join them, but said she already had a date.

"Why don't you ask Jake Macauley along, Caroline?"

Eve suggested. "Then, after dinner, we can wind up the evening on the Calypso Terrace."

Caroline hesitated. By now, she had come to the conclusion that Jake was avoiding her deliberately. But Eve's suggestion gave her a pretext for seeking him out.

"Yes, all right, I'll see if I can find him," she agreed.

Jake was at work in the cabana on the hotel beach where he kept all the Scuba equipment.

"Oh, hello, Caroline," he said offhandedly, when he glanced up and saw her in the doorway.

"How are you? I haven't seen you about lately," she remarked casually.

"Well, you know how it is . . . the season is hotting up now and I'm kept pretty busy."

"Yes, we're busier in the salon too." She told him the news about Eve, and about the invitation to make up a foursome.

But she knew he would not come. From the way he was avoiding looking at her, and from the general uneasiness of his manner, it was obvious that her surmise had been correct.

"Never mind. Some other time, perhaps," Caroline said equably, when he had made a transparently impromptu excuse about having some urgent repairs to do that evening.

Although she had already suspected it, his unexplained change of attitude was rather hurtful, and she could not help wondering if he had dropped her because he knew she was not a girl to engage in a casual love affair — the only relationship which interested him.

But later she dismissed this thought as an unworthy one; the kind of reason which Colin would have supplied for the situation.

On Friday afternoon, Caroline was tidying up the treatment room after her last appointment of the day when the receptionist came to tell her she was wanted in Mr. Dryden's office.

In the outer office, Ian's secretary told her to go straight in, and Caroline thought the other girl gave her a rather peculiar look.

But it was not until she opened the door and saw who else was awaiting her that she had a premonition of disaster.

Ian was sitting behind a large black-topped desk, his hands folded on the blotter, his expression completely inscrutable. In front of the desk, in an armchair, sat Mrs. Binyon, Caroline's first client after the lunch break. And to one side of the desk, perched on the edge of another chair and looking extremely worried and distressed, was Eve. A fourth chair, empty, had been placed directly opposite Ian.

"Come in, Miss Browning." He half rose to his feet, and gestured for her to sit down.

"I'm afraid what I have to say is not very pleasant," he told her, as soon as she was seated. "Earlier this afternoon you gave Mrs. Binyon a facial treatment which lasted approximately forty minutes. For part of that time she was asleep. Is that correct?"

"Yes, quite correct," Caroline agreed perplexedly. "Mrs. Binyon fell asleep during the massage and didn't wake up until I began to remove her toning mask."

"And were you with her all the time she was asleep?"

"No, I went to the staff room for about ten minutes and had a cup of tea. But that's quite usual," Caroline added.

"So I understand from Miss Arnold," Ian said briskly. "Could anyone else have entered the room while

you were away?"

"I shouldn't think so. Miss Arnold and Miss Gautier were both busy with clients, and the hairdressing staff have no reason to come into the treatment rooms," Caroline said, frowning slightly. What was the point of all these questions? she wondered. And why did Eve look worried, and Mrs. Binyon embarrassed?

"After Mrs. Binyon left the salon, she had tea on the terrace and then went to our boutique to buy some souvenirs," Ian went on dispassionately. "She then discovered that instead of having thirty pounds in her bag, she had only twenty-five pounds. She has accused you of taking some money from her bag while she was asleep, Miss Browning."

Caroline stared at him, dumbfounded. For some moments she could not believe she had heard him correctly. And then as Ian continued to look at her with no flicker of expression on his face, her own cheeks flushed with angry colour.

"It isn't true! I've never stolen a penny from anyone," she protested vehemently. And then, turning to Eve for support, "You don't believe this, do you?"

Before Eve could answer, Ian said curtly, "Miss Arnold has already expressed her opinion, Miss Browning. Now Mrs. Binyon says that her handbag was open while she was in the treatment room. She says she did not remove her glasses until she was on the couch, and that she put them in the bag and left it unfastened on a small table by the couch. She also says that her money was in a pocket in the lining of the bag, and clearly visible. Do you agree with that?"

"Yes, the bag was open and I did notice some banknotes in it," Caroline agreed. "But surely —"

She broke off as the door behind her opened, and a

big thick-set, middle-aged man in Bermuda shorts and a bright tartan shirt was shown in by Ian's secretary. He looked as puzzled as Caroline had been, and not in a very good temper.

"Say, what is all this?" he demanded, in a strong Texas accent.

Ian stood up and came round to the front of the desk. "I'm sorry to have interrupted your game of golf, Mr. Binyon. But an awkward situation has arisen, and I felt you should be present. Let me get you a chair."

Mr. Binyon glowered first at his wife, and then at Eve and Caroline. Then he gave a kind of resigned grunt, settled his bulky figure in the chair Ian pushed forward for him, and took a large cigar from a case in his shirt pocket.

Even though she was still stiff with indignation, Caroline could not help thinking it strange that such a large rough-diamond sort of man should have married a little fluttery, nervy person like Mrs. Binyon.

Briefly, his voice clipped, Ian explained the facts of the "awkward situation". When he had finished, Mr. Binyon sat puffing at his cigar for a moment or two. Then he took it out of his mouth and said, "Are you sure that you had that much money in your purse, Dolores?"

"Well, naturally I'm sure, Hector," Mrs. Binyon retorted petulantly. "I had counted it right after lunch. I had thirty-five pounds. I spent five pounds at the salon on my facial and some perfume. And then later I went to the boutique to buy cashmeres for Lucy and Diane. But when I came to pay the check, I didn't have thirty pounds left, I only had twenty-five. If I hadn't gone shopping I wouldn't have noticed, I guess. I don't usually keep a close account. After all, in a place like this one doesn't expect the staff to be dishonest."

"I think I should remind you that Miss Browning has strongly refuted this accusation, Mrs. Binyon," Ian put in at this point. "And you've heard Miss Arnold's statement with reference to her character and background."

His tone, although quiet and courteous, made Mrs. Binyon fluster.

"You don't imagine I'm enjoying all this unpleasantness, Mr. Dryden?"

"Now, Dolores, don't get yourself upset," her husband intervened swiftly. "You'd better go back to the suite and rest up for a while. Take one of your sedative powders. I'll deal with this business." He assisted her from her chair and steered her firmly towards the door.

Ian glanced at his watch and then at Eve.

"I don't think it's necessary for you to stay either, Miss Arnold. You'll be wanting to close the salon. Miss Browning, will you wait in Mr. Newbolt's office? He's not here this afternoon." He gestured towards the door of the adjoining room.

For Caroline, the following twenty minutes were the worst ordeal of her life. Confronted with this shattering accusation, she was suddenly terrifyingly conscious of being alone in an alien place. And it was scanty comfort to know that Eve had supported her. For Eve had not known her long. The only people who could effectively vouch for her honesty were more than three thousand miles away.

Slowly – agonizingly slowly – the seconds ticked away on the desk clock. Pacing around the room, her palms damp, Caroline heard the subdued murmur of voices from beyond the connecting door.

And as each minute dragged by like an hour and the murmur went on and on, she was pierced by a chilling certainty that, even if Ian believed her innocent, he

would not scruple to sacrifice her to maintain the hotel's reputation.

At last, when she felt she could not bear the tension for another interminable minute, the door opened, and she knew Ian was in the room with her.

Slowly, Caroline turned from the window towards him. And then she drew in her breath and felt sick. For the look on his face was that cold inimical expression she remembered from their very first meeting.

CHAPTER V

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting so long," Ian said crisply. "However, you'll be relieved to hear that, in the circumstances, Mr. Binyon has agreed to let the matter rest."

"I – I don't understand –" she stammered.

He moved to a cabinet behind the staff manager's desk, and opened a compartment containing bottles and glasses. After pouring some brandy into a small tumbler, he handed her the glass. "You'd better sit down and drink this. It will pull you together. I realize all this has been upsetting for you, but it's over and done with now."

"You mean it was all a mistake?" Caroline asked bewilderedly.

"Possibly – perhaps, not being used to Bermudian currency, Mrs. Binyon mistook a pound note for a five-pound note when she checked her money after lunch."

"But she was positive she hadn't miscounted. Her husband asked her that, and she said she was absolutely certain."

"Perhaps she dropped a note somewhere," Ian said, frowning. "Whatever the explanation may be, the issue is settled as far as you're concerned."

"Settled? How can it be settled? She accused me of stealing the money. I can't prove I didn't." Caroline said, her voice shaking.

"You don't have to prove anything. As I've told you, the matter is closed." There was a hint of impatience in his tone. "Now drink up the brandy, and try to put all this out of your mind."

She gaped at him incredulously. "You mean I'm supposed to forget it?"

"If you're sensible — yes," he said flatly.

Suddenly, Caroline was furious. She snapped the glass down on the desk. "Isn't that asking rather a lot?" she demanded angrily.

Ian's jaw set hard and he looked even grimmer than before.

"Perhaps it is," he said coldly, "but I'm afraid that in the present situation you will have to accept my judgment on what is best. I made every effort to dissuade Mrs. Binyon from making a direct accusation against you, but she's an impulsive, highly-strung woman, and she was too worked up to listen to reason."

"And as she's a guest and I'm only one of the staff, I'm expected to swallow my pride and overlook her impulsiveness, I suppose?"

"You seem to forget that, assuming the money was pilfered, there is a considerable weight of circumstantial evidence against you," he reminded her. "However, the Binyons are leaving to-morrow, and Mr. Binyon agrees with me that it would be a mistake to institute a formal investigation."

"What you mean, I suppose, is that losing five pounds is so unimportant to him that he's prepared to give me the benefit of the doubt? It must be nice to be so rich that you can accuse people of stealing and then gloss the whole thing over without so much as an apology," Caroline shot back bitterly.

And then, to crown her humiliation, her mouth began to tremble uncontrollably and her eyes filled with hot stinging tears.

"Oh, for heaven's sake —" Ian took a pace towards her.

She sprang to her feet and side-stepped away from him.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to have hysterics," she told him in a shaking voice. "May I go now?"

And, without waiting for his assent, she ran out of the room.

Outside the entrance to the hotel, she automatically turned to the path that led to the cabins. Then, feeling she could not face anyone, not even Eve, for a while, she changed her direction and hurried another way until she came to a vine-sheltered arbour in a distant part of the grounds.

It was the time of day when the majority of the Tropicana's guests were either congregated in one of the hotel cocktail lounges, or were up in their rooms dressing for dinner. But after Caroline had been in the arbour a few minutes, she heard someone approaching and hurriedly wiped her eyes and tried to look composed.

To her dismay, the man who came into view was not a stranger. It was Jake Macauley.

He took one look at her face, and said, "Caroline! What's the matter?"

"Hello, Jake. Why, nothing," she said brightly.

"Don't be silly – your eye-black is all smudged. You look like a wet Monday morning. Come on, tell me. What's wrong?" And he sat down beside her on the bench and put a comforting arm round her shoulders. "You haven't had bad news from home, have you?"

She shook her head and blew her nose. "It's nothing much. I – I don't usually sit around moping. I must be overtired or something."

"Well, tell me all about it, and I'll cheer you up," he told her gently.

And then, because she had an intuitive feeling that

Jake would understand better than anyone, she told him all that had happened in the past hour.

"I see . . . yes, it's rough," he said slowly, when she had finished. "But no one who knows you would believe you would steal, Caroline. You just aren't the light-fingered type. I bet you've never even swindled a tuppenny bus ride."

"That isn't the point," she said unhappily. "Don't you see? I can't ever clear myself. People can't be *sure* I didn't take it."

Jake gave her a reassuring hug. "You don't have to prove things to your friends, honey. They take you on trust. Anyway, you say Eve spoke up for you, and Dryden doesn't believe you pinched the money . . . so who else matters?"

Caroline bit her lip. "Mr. Dryden didn't say he didn't believe it. He's merely giving me the benefit of the doubt."

Jake gave a rather dry laugh. "Ian Dryden doesn't have doubts, my girl. He's not the indecisive type. If it had even crossed his mind that you might have whipped the old crow's cash, you wouldn't be sitting here now. You'd be halfway back to England. He prides himself on being a good judge of character. Otherwise he wouldn't have taken me on without any proper credentials. And if he pressured the woman's husband into dropping the whole nasty business, you can bet he doesn't believe you're the guilty party."

"What do you mean, 'pressured'?" Caroline asked.

"It's an American term for some pretty strong form of persuasion. Look, I imagine what you wanted was for Dryden to say point blank that he was sure you hadn't anything to do with it, and to more or less have told this Binyon woman to go to blazes. But surely you can see

how she would have reacted to that? When you're running a ritzy joint like the Tropicana, it isn't enough not to actively offend the customers – you have to lean over backwards to humour them. So it's no use feeling let down because he didn't leap to your defence with all guns blazing. He had to tackle the business more obliquely."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," she conceded, with a sigh. "But he could have said something afterwards. Oh, well, never mind . . . it's no use brooding about it, I suppose."

"That's my girl! Look, how about nipping back to the cabins for your swimsuit, and coming down to the beach for a quiet swim?" Jake suggested, bracingly.

"Yes, all right, I'd like that. And, Jake, thanks for bucking me up," Caroline said gratefully.

"That's okay – any time," he answered lightly.

For a moment she thought he was going to add something else. But perhaps she was mistaken, or perhaps he changed his mind, because he only gave her hand a friendly squeeze, and they set off along the path together.

They were halfway back to the cabins, walking along one of the main pathways through the gardens, when something very odd happened.

Turning a bend in the path, they saw another couple strolling towards them. And scarcely had the others come into sight when Jake gripped Caroline's arm above the elbow and bundled her through a gap in the surrounding shrubbery.

"What on earth was all that about?" she asked, in amazement, when he had forced her to push through several yards of thicket and they were in the open again.

"I'm sorry. Did I scare you?" There were beads of moisture on Jake's forehead and upper lip, and he was

obviously in a state of considerable shock.

"Jake, are you ill?" she asked anxiously.

He shook his head. He looked, she thought, like someone dazed and shaken up by a car accident.

"Those people . . . I didn't want them to see me," he said, passing his hand over his eyes. Then, before she could question him again, "I'll meet you down on the beach, Caroline." And with that he walked off, and left her staring after him.

Returning to the cabins, Caroline found Eve looking out for her.

"I've been worried about you," she said anxiously. "Mr. Dryden came to the salon and told me everything was going to be okay, but that you were very upset. I thought I'd find you in your room. Where have you been?"

"I wanted to be alone to calm down. I'm sorry you were worried, Eve." Caroline began to unbutton her overall. "Where is Marie-Laure?"

"Oh, she'd already gone when I went back to close up the salon. She doesn't know anything about this hateful business. I've made some coffee. Will you have some?"

"Yes, please. Eve, will you have to report all this to head office?"

"I don't think that's necessary," the older girl said thoughtfully. "My own opinion is that either Mrs. Binyon made a mistake in counting the money, or she dropped a fiver somewhere. Did I ever tell you about the time in the Fifth Avenue salon when one of the clients thought her diamond clip had been pinched?"

"No — what happened?"

"Oh, all hell was let loose," Eve said wryly. "Talk about panic stations! In the end, after the police had been called, the wretched clip was found in the client's

own bag. It had slipped through a hole in the lining. But did she apologize? – not a word! That's a curious thing about rich people. If anything is missing, they always jump to the conclusion that it's been stolen. It seems to be a phobia with them."

When Caroline went down to the beach, she saw Jake sitting on the diving raft moored about a hundred yards from the water's edge. Curious to hear the explanation for his extraordinary behaviour in the grounds, she swam out to join him, and he helped her clamber aboard.

At first, when he started talking about the American singer who was coming to the Tropicana for a high season cabaret engagement, Caroline thought he intended to ignore the incident. Then, after a pause, he said suddenly, "I'm sorry I lied to you about being busy on Monday night. I know you didn't believe the excuse I cooked up. I didn't mean to hurt you, Caroline. I thought it would be better for me to keep out of your way in future."

"Did you? Why, Jake?" she asked.

"Oh, it's a long story, and not a very pleasant one," he said wryly. "Let's just say I'm not a very suitable companion for someone like you."

Caroline found that she could not suppress her curiosity any longer. "Because of Mrs. Morell?" she asked him evenly.

He shot a wary glance at her. "What do you know about Bette Morell?"

"Only gossip, most of which is probably highly exaggerated."

Jake looked uncomfortable. "There's no smoke without fire," he said gruffly.

"So they say," she agreed. "But the amount of smoke isn't necessarily in proportion to the size of the fire. In

a place like Bermuda, even a spark is enough to set tongues wagging. Jake, why did you dodge out of sight when we met those people in the gardens?"

For an instant she thought he was going to tell her to mind her own business, and she regretted her hardihood.

But then, with a sigh and a shrug of resignation, he said, "The man's name is Macauley . . . Andrew Macauley. He's my younger brother. I don't know the girl with him. I imagine she's his wife. For all I know they may be here on honeymoon. You see, I haven't seen Drew for four years. In fact I never expected to set eyes on him again."

"Your brother!" Caroline exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Who did you imagine he was? Someone from Interpol? Well, I suppose my reaction was rather similar to a criminal confronted with the man who's tracking him down," Jake said, with a wry grimace. "I wonder how long they're staying here?" he went on, speaking half to himself. "God knows how I'm going to avoid them. Ten chances to one they'll want diving lessons. I suppose I could go sick for a week." He sat gnawing his upper lip for some moments, his troubled blue eyes gazing towards the towering balconied façade of the Tropicana on the headland above the beach.

"Why must you avoid him?" Caroline asked.

"The last time I saw Drew was the day my father kicked me out for embezzling money belonging to the family business," Jake said, in a flat voice. "He told me to get to hell out of England, and that if I ever came back he would tell the police what I'd done."

Caroline did not hesitate. "I don't believe it," she said calmly. "If you're trying to put me off you, you'll have to think of something more convincing than that, Jake. I don't believe you'd embezzle money any more than you

believe I stole from Mrs. Binyon's bag. You aren't that sort of man."

"Oh, Caroline, you don't know anything about me. I didn't want to disillusion you, but you forced me into a corner."

"You haven't disillusioned me," she said simply. "I expect you are capable of doing some bad things. So is everyone, given certain circumstances. I can imagine you getting into a fight and accidentally injuring somebody badly – or perhaps doing something illegal like smuggling because there was adventure and risk involved. But embezzlement – no! It's not like you."

"I believe you mean that," he said slowly.

She laid her hand on his arm. "What really happened, Jake?"

"If I tell you the truth, will you swear never to mention it to anyone . . . not even your own family?"

"Yes, I swear," she promised gravely.

Jake leaned back on one elbow, his gaze still fixed on the hotel. "I won't tell you the nature of my father's business – it's enough to say that it's a big private manufacturing company," he began. "My mother died when Drew and I were still at prep school. Drew is two years younger than I am. We were never much alike, except in looks. I was keen on sport, and he was the brainy one. I was always getting into scrapes – I was darn nearly expelled a couple of times – and Drew was the exemplary type. You know – head of his house, then head of the school. I don't want you to think I was ever jealous of him. It wasn't at all like that. As a matter of fact we were always very close. We had to be. We certainly didn't get any affection from Father. All he cared about was the business. God knows what sort of life Mother must have had with him."

He paused, and Caroline felt that it might be easier for him to talk if she did not watch him. She rolled over on to her stomach, and propped her chin in her hands, her eyes on the distant horizon.

"By the time Drew came down from Oxford, I was already in the business," Jake went on. "I wasn't much use around the place, and I was always having blazing rows with Father. Every three months or so he threatened to chuck me out on my ear, but it didn't worry me particularly. My mother had left some money for when I came of age, and I was having a high old time. I bought myself a flashy sports car, and spent the weekends in town and generally lived it up. Then the money ran out and I had to sober down a good deal. Anyway, the gay life had begun to pall by then. I'd met a girl who was different from my usual run, and I was even feeling an urge to become a solid citizen." He broke off and gave a hard laugh. "It was rather ironic, I suppose."

"Ironic?" Caroline prompted quietly, when he seemed to have forgotten her presence.

"Well, you see my brother came down from university laden with first-class honours, and my father seemed quite proud of his achievements. And then, six months later, Drew came to me in one hell of a state. Apparently he'd got himself involved with some pretty raffish types at Oxford, and they had introduced him to a gambling place in town. He had been crazy enough to try and recoup his losses, with the result that he was up to his ears in debt. But what really shook me was that he'd been fiddling company funds, and had even written a cheque on my father's private account."

"You mean forged it?" Caroline asked, horrified.

Jake nodded. "There wasn't any way out of the situation – I mean in the sense of covering it up. And, know-

ing Father, there wasn't much to hope for in owning up either. We knew he would try and avoid a public scandal, but it would be curtains for Drew as far as the firm was concerned. He would be cut off without a penny, as the saying goes."

"So you volunteered to take the blame?" Caroline said, sitting up now.

"No — I wish to God I had!" he answered tersely. "But I'm afraid my immediate reaction was to think Drew had asked for all that was coming to him. Not a very noble attitude, perhaps. But, although I'd been fairly wild in my time, I had drawn the line at forging cheques."

"Then how was it that you became the scapegoat in the end?"

"It was Drew's idea," he said, in a low voice. "It made sense, when you come to think about it. I was already the black sheep of the family. I hadn't so far to fall from grace as he had. I daresay my yen to settle down was only a temporary aberration anyway."

"But, Jake — to wreck your whole life for him!" Caroline protested, deeply shocked. "And what about the girl you mentioned?"

"I had just found out that Aline was in love with someone else, so that didn't complicate the issue."

"But how could you be sure that, if you took the blame for your brother, he wouldn't do the same thing again?"

"I thought about that, but I was pretty sure that Drew wasn't a gambler by nature," he said. "You know there are some people who, if the bug once bites them, can't ever get it out of their system. But Drew had never really got any kick out of gambling. For him it was simply a question of being caught in a quicksand. The more he struggled to get out of the wretched business,

the more deeply involved he became. I suppose what really clinched the decision was that I knew I could survive being thrown out. I didn't think Drew could. It would have finished him. Anyway, you see now why I don't want him to know I'm here if it can possibly be avoided."

"No, I can't say I do," Caroline said frankly. "You have no cause to be ashamed. Why should you have to keep under cover? Surely it's your brother who should feel embarrassed, not you."

"That's the point," he said dryly. "Drew didn't get off scot free, you know. Do you imagine the last four years have been easy for him, Caroline? I should think he's had a miserable life, poor devil."

"You pity him?" she asked, astonished.

"Yes, I suppose I do," Jake said thoughtfully. "I know I would rather be in my shoes than in his. It doesn't really matter what other people think of you, but it must be grim to have a low opinion of yourself. Perhaps I ought not to avoid him after all. It might square his conscience a bit if he knew I was getting along all right. However, enough of my problems. Let's see if you can beat me back to the beach." And he sprang to his feet and held out his hand to pull her up.

Presently, while they were drying themselves, Caroline said, "Will you take me out to the reef again on Sunday?"

Jake hesitated. Then with a reluctant grin, he said, "Okay, if you insist. My good intentions never were very durable, and I suppose you're old enough to choose the company you keep."

When Caroline woke up the following morning, the sun was shining through her window and a red-bird was sing-

ing somewhere close by. But almost immediately she was conscious of a reluctance to face the day ahead, and as the events of the previous afternoon came crowding back, she groaned and rolled over with her face into the pillow. For the first time since she had come to Bermuda, a great wave of homesickness engulfed her.

After breakfast, she set out for the hotel ahead of Eve and Marie-Laure because she wanted to return Ian's books. She had not finished reading them, but she felt that, in the circumstances, she could not bear to have them lying about her room.

As she had anticipated, there was no one in the outer office. The typewriter on the secretary's desk was hidden under a plastic dust cover, and in Mr. Newbolt's office a cleaning woman looked up from her dusting to call a cheerful "'Mornin', missy."

"Good morning." Caroline laid the parcel of books on the desk. She had written "Mr. Dryden. Private" on the wrapping.

Then, as she turned to leave, the door of the other office opened, and Ian himself appeared.

Caroline felt her cheeks flame with sudden colour. She had forgotten his habit of starting work at seven.

"I – I was returning your books, Mr. Dryden." She gestured at the desk. "Thank you for lending them to me."

"Not at all. Did you find them interesting?"

"Yes . . . very," she murmured awkwardly.

Taut nerves making her clumsy, she knocked her gondola basket against a chair and some of the contents tipped on to the floor.

Ian stepped forward to help her retrieve them. As they both reached for her sunglasses, Caroline's fingers brushed his sleeve. She jerked her hand away as if the contact had stung her.

He straightened, examining the glasses to see if they had been damaged. Unlike the close-carpeted inner offices, the outer office had a hard tiled floor.

"No harm done." Instead of giving them back to her, he stood with the glasses in his hands, looking down at her with an expression she could not read.

Caroline swallowed. "Mr. Dryden . . . about yesterday. I'm sorry I lost my temper."

The apology was entirely unpremeditated. The words seemed to come out of their own volition. Indeed, until that moment, she had had no intention of retracting her angry outburst.

"I understand." Ian replaced the sunglasses in her basket, and opened the outer door for her.

In that moment, as he politely dismissed her, Caroline realized how unimportant she was to him — of no more account than all the other members of the staff. In fact, if it had not been for her acquaintance with Nona Meredith, she would have had little more to do with him than she had with Mr. Newbolt.

On Saturday morning, she had a telephone call from Colin. He wanted her to come to a beach barbecue at his home that evening. Because she was in a mood to snatch at any distraction, Caroline accepted the invitation, and Colin arranged to come and fetch her at nine o'clock.

"I thought you weren't too keen on that young man?" Eve remarked in surprise, when Caroline told her where she was going.

"I'm not — but I don't feel in the mood for a quiet evening," Caroline said restlessly. "You don't mind my going, do you?"

"Of course not, honey. I'm going to write a long letter to Peter, and then go to bed early and dream up a glamorous trousseau." Eve spread the fingers of her left hand

and looked lovingly at her pearl and diamond engagement ring.

Caroline had expected her to be in rather low spirits since Peter's return to New York, but the older girl seemed quite happy at the prospect of staying in Bermuda until the end of the summer.

Caroline dressed for the barbecue in French navy shorts and a navy and white striped cotton sweater. As she was ready by a quarter to nine, she decided to walk down to the main gates and wait for Colin.

She had just emerged from the secondary driveway on to the main one when Ian's white sports car passed her. He did not notice her – or at least gave no sign of doing so – but Caroline had time to see that he was in evening dress.

Going out with Elaine Fitzgerald, I suppose, she thought, as the car turned a bend and disappeared.

Colin was a few minutes late and, as she sat on a white seat inside the gateway, the beauty of the massed oleanders and their haunting early summer scent filled her with another surge of restlessness.

When Colin did arrive, sweeping in through the gates with a reckless disregard for anything that might be coming the other way, he nearly missed seeing her, and stamped on the brake so hard that Caroline winced at the screech of his scorched tyres.

"Sorry I'm late," he apologized, as she climbed in beside him. "It's been one of those days when everything goes haywire. Have you got your swimsuit with you?"

"Yes, I'm wearing it under my clothes."

"Very nice too," Colin said, eyeing her slender figure approvingly.

When they reached his home – a sprawling one-storey

building with the massive buttressed chimneys which were such a distinctive feature of Bermudian architecture – Caroline was startled to see Ian's sports car among a number parked round the forecourt.

"Your cousin is here!" she exclaimed, dismayed.

"He's not coming to the barbecue. He's here for Ma's party," Colin explained.

Down on the beach, at the end of his mother's garden, Colin's other guests were already enjoying themselves. Some were fooling about in the water, others were energetically dancing in a gaily canopied pavilion built close to the low bluff which divided the garden from the sands. In the centre of the beach a bonfire had been prepared, but was not yet alight, and not far from the pavilion a coloured youth in a chef's hat was arranging kebabs and sausages on the grid of a stone-built barbecue.

Until about eleven o'clock, Caroline quite enjoyed herself. She danced and swam and ate hot spicy kebabs and buttered rolls. Then the beach fire was lit and everyone gathered round and sang *Blowin' In The Wind* and *River Bird*, led by two boys with guitars. That was fun; the fire crackling and sparking, and the singing echoing out across the sea.

But afterwards the party began to get out of hand. There was some horseplay in the water which Caroline thought stupid and possibly dangerous, and then some people started throwing bits of sausage and bread pellets, and others went into uninhibited huddles in the shadow of the bluff.

Colin behaved fairly well, but he did not appear to have drunk as much canned beer as some of his guests. Caroline loathed beer, and stuck to bitter lemon. But what she would really have liked was a glass of cold milk.

It must have been nearly midnight when she felt a sharp pain under her heel, and found she had cut herself on a piece of glass half buried in the powdery sand.

Earlier, someone had accidentally smashed a tumbler near the spot where she was standing. All the fragments were supposed to have been collected, but obviously one piece had been missed.

"It's a nasty gash. You'd better come up to the house and I'll patch it up for you." Colin called one of the other men to help him make a chair for her, and together they carried her up the steps to the top of the bluff and through the garden.

"Okay, John, no need for you to stay. I can cope now," Colin said, when they had reached a verandah and lowered Caroline on to a couch.

"I'm sure you can, old boy," the other man said, with a grin.

Colin laughed, but when John had left them he noticed Caroline's expression and said, "Oh, don't mind him. He was only kidding. Look, you'd better come inside where I can see properly."

He opened some french doors, and switched on a light which was much brighter than the dim lamp on the verandah.

It was not until Caroline had hobbled over the threshold that she realized the room was his bedroom. There were a couple of easy chairs, but one had some gramophone records on it, and the other was piled with boxes of tennis balls and oddments, and there was nowhere else to sit but on the edge of the single divan.

Colin turned on the taps at the handbasin in a corner of the room.

"I'll get some antiseptic. I won't be a minute." He disappeared into a passage, closing the door behind him.

While he was away, Caroline examined the cut. It was not bleeding much, but it was deep and full of sand. At the moment it did not hurt. But even if it was painful later, at least it gave her an excuse for leaving the party early.

I shouldn't have come in the first place. It serves me right really, she thought.

Colin came back with some clean towels and a well-equipped first aid box.

"You'd better lie down so that I can get at it more easily. I'm afraid it's going to hurt, cleaning it up. Would you like a shot of brandy before I start?" he asked.

The suggestion made Caroline smile. "You're not probing for a bullet," she said dryly. "Don't worry, I won't faint away."

Because he was nervous of hurting her, the cleaning operation was much more uncomfortable than it need have been. Caroline set her teeth and tried not to flinch as he forced the cut open and gingerly dabbed at the embedded grains of sand. By the time he had finished, she was feeling rather sick.

"There, I think that will do." Colin cut some lint and used a whole roll of bandage to anchor it in place. "I'm afraid I'm not too hot at this sort of thing. Are you feeling okay? You look a bit woozy."

"Do I? I feel all right." Caroline swung her legs to the floor. "Thanks, Colin. I'm sorry to be such a nuisance."

"It wasn't your fault." He put his arm round her waist to help her stand.

The next thing she knew was that he had both arms round her and was kissing her.

For an instant, Caroline was too surprised to resist him. When she did push him away, it was with more

exasperation than anger. What a time to choose to kiss her!

In freeing herself, she put weight on her injured foot, and momentarily closed her eyes against the sharp pain. When she opened them, she was looking straight at Ian Dryden, his tall white-coated figure framed by the open french doors.

"I'm sorry to intrude," he said smoothly, "but your party seems to be becoming rather unruly, Colin. Go and see if you can tone things down slightly, will you?" He noticed Caroline's bandaged foot. "What's this? Has there been an accident?"

"It's nothing serious. Come on, Caroline." Looking daggers at his cousin, Colin took her arm and moved towards the verandah.

But Ian remained, barring their way out. "What happened?" he asked sharply.

"I cut my foot. Colin has been dressing it for me," Caroline said stiffly.

How long had he been there? she wondered. Had he seen Colin trying to embrace her?

"Not very expertly, by the look of it. What did you cut it on?" Ian persisted.

"A piece of glass. She's all right," Colin said brusquely.

"I'll take a look, if you don't mind." Ian stepped into the room, forcing his cousin to give way. "Off you go," he said summarily. "The racket on the beach is disturbing your mother's party."

For a moment, Colin looked defiant. Then, with a sullen shrug, he said, "Oh, very well. I shan't be five minutes, Caroline, then I'll take you home."

When he had gone, Ian took off his dinner jacket, unlinked his cuffs and rolled them back over his forearms.

Without looking at Caroline, he moved to the basin to wash his hands.

She watched him in silence, knowing it would be futile to argue with him. After a moment or two, she sat down on the bed once more. Her heel was throbbing now, and she felt cold and curiously exhausted.

Having dried his hands, Ian went down on his haunches and unpinned the bandage which Colin had fastened across her instep. The cut must have started to bleed again as he had to pull the piece of lint away from it.

"Hm . . . just as I thought. This isn't anything like clean," he said, with a frown of annoyance. "If it weren't so late, I'd run you round to the doctor. As it is, I'll deal with it myself. Lie down and turn over on your front, will you."

It was an order, and she obeyed it without protest because she knew that, if the cut was not clean, it would be childishly perverse to object to his ministrations.

"Colin did his best. He was afraid of hurting me," she said, with her face against the counterpane.

"Very likely — but a few minutes' pain now is preferable to an infected wound tomorrow," Ian said incisively. She felt him grip her ankle. "I'll be as quick as I can."

This time the pain was really agonizing. Her whole body went stiff and she dug her fingers into the bedding, thankful that her face was turned away from him.

"It doesn't need to be bandaged. A plaster will hold the dressing in place overnight," Ian said presently. "Tomorrow you'd better let our resident nurse have a look at it."

"Yes, I will. Thank you." Caroline sat up, feeling weak and a little giddy. She wished Colin would come back.

Ian replaced the things he had used, and tossed the discarded bandage into a waste paper basket. As he turned down his shirt-sleeves, she saw him cast a disapproving eye over the untidiness of the room. It was not squalidly untidy because there were probably at least two maids in the house to keep the basin gleaming and the furnishings dusted. But it was evident that Colin never put anything away when he could rely on other people to tidy up after him. The room reminded Caroline of Joey's chaotic bedroom. But Joey was still a boy. Clearly Ian felt that his cousin should have outgrown this state of disorder.

Poor Colin. Perhaps he was spoiled and immature for his age, but it must be unnerving to have someone like Ian constantly checking on him.

"Perhaps I'd better run you back myself," Ian said abruptly, when he had put on his jacket and there was still no sign of Colin coming back.

"I don't mind waiting for him," Caroline said hastily. "Shouldn't you be getting back to your own party?" She levered herself off the bed and limped on to the verandah.

Ian followed. "Where are your shoes?"

"I left them on the beach. Colin will bring them. Oh, here he comes now."

"What a relief!" Ian's tone was sardonic. Then he swung on his heel and walked away.

That night, Caroline dreamed she was exploring the reef gardens, alone. Suddenly she was trapped. Somehow the harness of her aqua-lung had caught on a coral branch, and she could not free herself. As she twisted and turned in the water, she saw three other divers swimming towards her. They were masked, but she knew who they were. Colin and Jake passed by, ignoring her signals for help. But Ian unsheathed his knife and cut her

free. Then he put his arms round her, and they began to soar up towards the surface. But before they reached it, her supply of air ran out and she felt herself starting to suffocate. . . .

She woke up with the sheet over her face. Her heart was thumping, and she felt hot and sticky. Although her window was open, the room seemed stiflingly close. Then a flash of sheet lightning lit the sky, followed by a heavy roll of thunder.

Caroline threw back the bedclothes and turned over her hot rumpled pillow. Presently she heard the first heavy drops of rain pattering on the leaves in the shrubbery outside.

Even though she was fully awake now, she could not quite dispel the reality of her strange dream. Yet it was not the horrible sensation of choking which lingered with her, but the wonderful feeling she had experienced when Ian cut her free and drew her close to him. And she knew then that she was in love with him.

When, on Sunday afternoon, Jake saw Caroline's limp and learned about her injured heel, he would not let her dive.

"But salt water is good for cuts," she argued.

"Yes, but if you spend all afternoon in the water the skin will get soggy and take longer to knit together," he said firmly. "There are plenty of other things to do. You haven't seen the Crystal Cave yet, have you? Come on: we'll go sightseeing."

Because his car was being serviced, they hired one of the carriages from the rank outside the hotel's main entrance. Their carriage had a bright pink canopy with a white fringe all round the edge.

"I feel as if I'm back in my pram," Caroline said, as

they jogged down the drive. "Jake, have you seen your brother yet?"

"Yes . . . last night. I had a couple of drinks with him."

"What did he say? Wasn't he stunned at seeing you?"

"He was pretty shaken. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if he decided the air here didn't suit him," Jake said, on an acid note.

"What do you mean? Did you quarrel?"

"No, it all went off very smoothly, considering the circumstances."

"Then why do you think he may leave?"

"Well, my father has been dead for two years, so Drew is head of the firm now. I think he's afraid I may try a spot of extortion."

"Surely he can't," she protested. "Why, if it hadn't been for you —"

Jake cut her short. "Human nature has some odd quirks, Caroline. Sometimes if people have to live with a lie, they end up believing it's the truth. I think Drew has managed to convince himself that I really am the skeleton in the Macauley closet. His wife thinks so. She has obviously been told I'm a villain of the deepest dye. I fancy she was rather disappointed that I wasn't knocking back absinthe and leering at her."

"Oh, Jake, how can you joke about it? I think it's absolutely abominable," Caroline said indignantly. "If your brother had any conscience he would insist on making it up to you."

"He hasn't anything I want," Jake said, shrugging. "If he offered me a seat on the board, I wouldn't accept it. Life in England has lost its appeal for me."

"Well, if you don't want to go back, he ought to set you up in something over here. You could have your own

diving and water-skiing school.”

“I doubt if it would be a paying proposition,” Jake said carelessly. “Business would fall off too sharply during the cooler months. I swim all year round, but middle-aged tourists don’t. In fact the Tropicana probably makes a loss on my services even in the high season. But they’re prepared to subsidize me because it lengthens the list of amenities in their brochure.”

“There are other things you could do if you had some capital to get started,” Caroline pointed out. “You can’t live aimlessly for ever, Jake. It’s . . . such a waste.”

“A waste of what? I haven’t any special talents. Anyway, if I wanted to set myself up, I wouldn’t need Drew’s help. I’ve some savings – not much, but enough.”

By this time they had reached their destination and, when their driver had reined in the horse, Jake sprang down from the carriage and handed Caroline out. To reach the Crystal Cave, they went down a sloping subway, the air becoming noticeably chilly after the warmth of the day above ground.

Then, as the great cavern opened up ahead of them, Caroline saw that the roof was clustered with thousands of sharp-tipped stalactites, like a fantastic array of giant icicles. And what made the sight even more breathtaking was that these petrified cascades were reflected in the glassy surface of a vast underground lake.

“Extraordinary place, isn’t it? I wonder what the temperature of the water is?” Jake said, his voice echoing oddly.

“What a wonderful setting for a ballet.” Caroline dropped her own voice to a whisper. “The Palace of the Snow Queen . . . you know, the one in the fairytale with ice round her heart.”

They walked along the wooden causeway built out

over the motionless water. There were no other visitors about, and the atmosphere was primeval and curiously eerie.

Caroline shivered, partly from physical cold, and partly because the water looked so deep and mysterious. Jake put his arm round her. "It isn't the right setting for you. You belong in the sun, with the wind in your hair."

She lifted a startled face, for there had been a note in his voice which was new to her. But perhaps she had only imagined it, because he was looking, not at her, but at a particularly large stalactite. A moment later, he said briskly, "You'll catch cold down here without a jersey, and too much standing will make your foot sore. Let's get back above ground, shall we?"

As Jake had prophesied, his brother and sister-in-law left the Tropicana on Monday afternoon. Caroline witnessed their departure yerself.

Eve had given her the key of the Sanchia showcase in the entrance hall, and had asked her to change the display and put in some de luxe bottles of "Sea Foam" sun-filter cream, a new line which had just been flown in from New York, and which was being lavishly promoted in all the glossy magazines.

"This girl looks exactly like you, Caroline," Eve had said teasingly, when they first saw the double-page colour spread showing a golden-skinned girl leaping into the sea from a beach remarkably similar to the one below the Tropicana.

"Except that I don't usually prance into the water in nothing but a couple of gold bracelets," Caroline had pointed out. The caption read:

"Be a sun goddess this summer! Let soothing, mois-

turizing "Sea Foam" protect and gild your skin all through those long lazy days on beach and patio. Cool as a veil of spindrift (yet rich with the humecants which revitalize a pale winter-weary skin), fragrant "Sea Foam" shields the most delicate complexions from harmful burning rays. Basking or bathing, let "Sea Foam" transform you . . . capture the honey sheen of a daughter of Neptune . . . the amber glow of an Aztec princess."

While she was arranging the "Sea Foam" bottles, Caroline heard a man's voice so much like Jake's that she immediately turned to see if it was Jake. But it was not Jake, but his younger brother, who was standing a few feet away from her. And even if she had not heard him speaking, she would have known who he was. His resemblance to Jake was most marked.

It was equally clear that he and his wife were on the point of leaving the hotel. Mrs. Macauley was choosing magazines at the paper kiosk, while Andrew held her expensive pigskin make-up case and conferred with a porter from the luggage room.

Then, as he turned full face towards her, Caroline saw that although he had Jake's straw-coloured hair and sandy eyebrows, his eyes were a paler, colder blue and he had a fair moustache and small flat-set ears.

He must have felt her staring at him, as he caught her eye and she hastily returned her attention to the showcase.

She knew that, even if she had known nothing about him, she would not have liked the look of him. She had noticed that he was wearing a patterned silk cravat tucked inside the collar of his shirt, and she had always had an irrational mistrust of men who wore cravats. It

was a Browning family joke that cravats and club blazers and sheepskin motoring coats were the mark of the phoney.

Well, it's certainly true of Andrew Macauley, Caroline thought acidly. He's as phoney as they come.

By mid-week, she was able to walk without limping, and she and Jake began to spend all their free time together. Twice Colin telephoned, wanting to take her out. But Caroline told him, quite truthfully, that she was already engaged.

One evening, about a fortnight after the barbecue party, Caroline waited so long for Jake to collect her for an evening out in Hamilton that eventually she decided to walk over to his cabin and see what was detaining him.

She had never been to his cabin before, but she knew it was somewhere behind the hotel tennis courts, and that he had the place to himself.

When she arrived there, Jake's blue sweater was hanging over the back of a chair on the verandah, but there was no sign of him being about. All the doors were closed, as were the shutters at the bedroom window. Concluding that he must have already left – perhaps they had missed each other in the grounds – Caroline was on the point of turning back when she thought she heard a sound from the shuttered bedroom.

Puzzled, she decided to knock on the door.

For a moment after she knocked, there was no response. Then Jake's voice called, "Who is it?"

"It's me . . . Caroline."

Wondering why he had closed the shutters on such a warm balmy evening, she waited for him to come to the door.

When he did, his expression was so unwelcoming that involuntarily she stepped back a pace.

"I wonder what had happened to you," she explained, startled by his unusually high colour and blood-shot eyes.

"Didn't you get my message?" he asked gruffly.

"No . . . what message?"

"I asked one of the pages to tell you I couldn't make it this evening."

"He must have forgotten. Jake, are you all right? You look so flushed."

"I'm all right. I'm sorry about our date. I'll see you tomorrow, Caroline." He shut the door.

Caroline frowned and bit her lip. If his words had been at all slurred, she would have thought he had been drinking. But in spite of his strange appearance, his voice had been quite normal. And then, suddenly, something in his brusque, almost hostile attitude struck a chord, and an instant later she heard the unmistakable sound of him slumping heavily on to his bed.

She opened the door, walked into his room, and closed it quietly behind her.

"You're ill," she said composedly. "Why on earth didn't you say so?"

Jake was spreadeagled on his rumpled divan, holding a wet face flannel against his forehead. He sat up with a jerk and glared at her.

"Now look here, Caroline—" he began.

"It's no use bellowing at me," she said gently. "I've a father and three brothers, and they're all like bears with sore heads when they aren't feeling well. How long have you been like this?"

"It came on this afternoon. It's not serious," he said disagreeably. "I'd rather be left alone. Why do women all fuss so?"

"Because men are so foolish. You're obviously running a temperature. I think a doctor should see you."

Jake flopped back on the pillow. He had taken off his shirt, and his chest and shoulders glistened with sweat. His arm, when she touched it, was burning.

"Look, I know what's the matter with me," he said. "It's some damned bug I picked up in Venezuela ages ago. Sand tick fever, it's called. It won't last more than twelve hours, then I'll be okay again. So just leave me alone, there's a good girl."

"Oughtn't you to be taking lots of fluids?" she suggested. There was nothing to drink on the table beside the bed.

"You can make me a pot of tea, if you like," he said reluctantly. "That would help to sweat it out of my system. But I'm not too steady on my pins, so I haven't bothered."

"Right: I'll do that." Caroline left her bag on a chair, and went softly out of the room.

He kept his kitchenette very neat, and she had no difficulty in finding the things she needed. She would have liked to make him get into bed properly – he probably ought to keep covered, even though he was so hot – but guessed that such a suggestion would be angrily rejected.

Even her mild easy-going father was surly and intractable when he had anything wrong with him.

After she had taken the tea in to him, Caroline agreed to leave him in peace.

"But I'll pop over just before bedtime in case there's anything you want," she told him decisively. "I won't disturb you if you're asleep."

Eve had gone to a concert in Hamilton that evening, and Marie-Laure was always out after seven. So Caroline passed the time writing a letter to Shelagh, her closest

friend in the London salon, and doing some repairs to her clothes.

It was a little after half past ten when she set out for Jake's cabin for the second time. A full moon lit the grounds, and the night was so still that she could hear music coming from the direction of the Calypso Terrace.

There was no light slanting through the bedroom shutters when she came within sight of the cabin. Thinking Jake was asleep, she tiptoed across the verandah and stealthily opened the door to take a quick peep at him. But as the moonlight illumined the darkness, she saw him turn his head towards her, and then stretch out his hand.

She moved to the bedside. "How are you feeling?"

"A bit better now, thanks." His fingers closed over hers. "I'm sorry I snarled at you earlier."

"It doesn't matter. It was only because you felt so rotten. Can I get you anything?"

"No, thanks." He shifted on to his side and settled his head against the pillow, as if he were already half asleep. "Goodnight, Caroline."

"Goodnight." She pressed his hand affectionately and turned away.

As she reached the door, she heard him say drowsily, "Remind me to tell you I love you, will you?"

Caroline hesitated, then she stepped out on to the verandah and closed the door behind her.

But as she walked slowly back through the grounds, she was both puzzled and disturbed. Had Jake meant that literally, or had it been merely an expression of the same uncomplicated affection she felt for him? Her mind went back to the afternoon at the Crystal Cave, when he had told her she belonged in the sun, with the wind in her hair. Was it possible that he had fallen in love with her?

No – no, it can't be, she thought. I couldn't bear to hurt him. Oh, it *mustn't* be true. That would be dreadful.

Absorbed in this distressing possibility, she did not notice that someone was following her.

"Just a minute – I want to speak to you." The sharply spoken command cut across her thoughts like a whiplash, making her jump.

Alarmed and shaken, she turned. "Ian! . . . I mean, Mr. Dryden. They – they said you'd gone to New York this week," she stammered.

And, at the sight of him, Jake was forgotten and her heart began to beat wildly against her ribs, and the night was suddenly charged with excitement and magic. It was two weeks since she had last seen him . . . two weeks of telling herself that she must not think of him at all. But now he was here, and her resolutions dissolved like mist in the wind.

"And while the cat is away, the mice can play. Is that your motto, Miss Browning?" he asked her harshly.

His tone jerked her brutally back to reality.

"I don't know what you mean," she said blankly.

"I was walking round the tennis courts when I saw you slipping out of Macauley's cabin. You have a copy of our rules, haven't you?"

"The rules? – oh, the rules. Yes, I have." Even then she did not understand.

"I gather you've never bothered to study them. It's expressly forbidden for members of the staff living in cabins to entertain people of the opposite sex," he informed her coldly. "I know you're under the impression that I have very little authority over you. But let me make one thing quite clear. If it's ever brought to my attention that you've visited Macauley again, I shall send you back

to England immediately – with Miss Arnold's sanction or without it! ”

And before she could fully grasp his implication, he had disappeared down the path to the putting green.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Caroline returned to the cabins, some time after Ian had flung his blistering ultimatum at her, Eve took one look at her face and sprang up from her chair on the verandah.

"Caroline! What's the matter, honey? Here, sit down. You look all to pieces. There hasn't been an accident, has there?"

"No . . . nothing like that." Caroline sank back on to the lounge, her nerves raw with pain and anger. And because she had to tell someone, she poured out the whole galling story, and all her bitter resentment at Ian's arbitrary condemnation of her.

"I can't understand it," Eve said incredulously. "He's always seemed such a fair man. To judge you without knowing the facts . . . it doesn't seem like him at all."

"You're forgetting that business over the money," Caroline reminded her tersely. "I knew he wasn't convinced I didn't take it. And then he saw Colin trying to kiss me, and probably assumed I had encouraged him. Now he thinks I'm a cheap little —"

"I'll soon make it clear that you aren't!" Eve intervened indignantly. "I'll see him first thing in the morning. He'll listen to me."

"Oh, no, Eve, I'd rather you didn't. Let him think what he likes. I don't care. Please, there's no need for you to be involved."

"But what about Jake?" Eve objected. "This reflects on him too, you know, Caroline."

"It won't worry Jake. He doesn't care what people

think of him. Eve, promise me you won't speak to Ian. I mean it. I'd rather forget it."

"I don't understand you," Eve said, frowning. "You're obviously very upset. Why not let me straighten things out for you? I'm sure Mr. Dryden would apologize if he knew the truth of the matter. Why let him think badly of you?"

"Oh, yes, I can see him apologizing!" Caroline said, with heavy sarcasm. "I'm sure he would positively grovel. Oh, Eve, don't you see? If he hadn't thought badly of me already, he would never have jumped to that conclusion. As far as I'm concerned, I just want to keep out of his way. I wish I'd never set eyes on him."

An instant later she regretted this last remark, because Eve gave her such a searching look that she was afraid she might have given herself away.

But the older girl only said, "Well, we'll see. You may have changed your mind by the morning."

But the next day, Caroline was still fiercely opposed to Eve's offer to intercede with her. And after another argument the American girl eventually agreed to respect her wishes in the matter.

"But you're being very foolish. Perhaps Jake will be able to make you see sense," she said, as they left for the salon.

Caroline had no intention of telling Jake anything about the incident. She had an uneasy suspicion that, if he ever found out what had happened, he would go charging to her defence and end up getting himself sacked. About twenty minutes after the salon opened for the day, the receptionist came to tell her that Mr. Dryden would like her to go to his office.

"Now? I can't. My first client will be here in a minute."

"No, not now. His secretary said as soon as it was convenient," the receptionist explained.

"Oh, very well," Caroline said briskly, sensing the girl's curiosity.

Now what? she thought apprehensively. Had Eve gone back on her promise? No, there had not been time. Eve's first client had already arrived.

Her first two treatments seemed interminable, and although she tried hard to concentrate, it was impossible to give a good rhythmic massage when her mind was in a turmoil of speculation. But at last, at eleven-fifteen, she had a twenty-minute break between appointments.

Ian's secretary was on the telephone when Caroline entered the outer office. She put her hand over the mouthpiece. "Mr. Dryden is free. You can go straight in, Miss Browning."

Ian was looking out of the window when Caroline opened his door. Although he had called "Come in" in response to her knock, it was five or six seconds before he swivelled his chair to face her.

Then he rose punctiliously to his feet, and indicated the chair in which Mrs. Binyon had sat on the occasion of Caroline's previous summons to his office.

"Good morning. Please sit down."

Caroline sat, her back very straight, her hands folded primly in her lap. Her face was stony, but there was a tight knot of tension inside her.

"I expect you've guessed why I asked to see you," he began, after another short pause.

"I have no idea," she said stiffly.

"I made a point of seeing Macauley this morning. It seems I owe you an apology."

Caroline looked at her hands. What did he expect her to say? That it didn't matter? That she quite understood

his mistake?

"Is Jake feeling better today?" she enquired with frigid politeness.

"So he says. He doesn't look too fit." With another swing of his chair, Ian rose and moved to the window. "But the fact that he was ill last night doesn't alter the regulations. Why didn't you call a doctor?"

"He didn't wish it," she said briefly.

Ian jingled loose change in his pockets, his eyes on the crowded terrace below the window. As was usual, when he was at the hotel, he was wearing a pale grey suit and a plain dark tie.

"Possibly – but it would have been the most sensible action on your part." He turned to face her, catching her glance before she could swiftly avert it.

Then a light flashed on the desk intercom and, after a momentary hesitation, he depressed one of the keys and his secretary's voice announced that someone else was waiting to see him.

"Miss Browning is just leaving." With a nod to Caroline, he indicated that the interview was over.

When she returned to the salon, there was a note from Jake waiting for her. He wanted her to meet him on the beach during her lunch break.

She found him lounging in a deck chair at the south end of the beach. And, although he sprang to his feet when he saw her coming, he still looked far from well.

"Oh, Jake, you should be in bed," she said concernedly. "You surely aren't working today?"

"No, not today. I don't feel up to it," he admitted. "But I'll be all right by tomorrow. These bouts never knock me out for long."

"How often do you get these attacks?"

"Not often – once or twice a year, perhaps. They're

no worse than a touch of 'flu." He watched her unbuckle her sandals and shake them off. "You don't look too bright yourself today."

"I didn't sleep very well. I'm all right," she said, mustering a smile.

"I had a visit from Dryden this morning," Jake told her, as they sat down. "Apparently he saw you leaving my cabin last night. Fortunately I managed to convince him that there were extenuating circumstances, other—I think he would have fired me on the spot. As it was, he made it pretty clear that he didn't approve of our friendship."

"What did you say?" Caroline asked.

"Among other things, I told him to go to blazes," Jake said cheerfully.

"Oh, Jake, you didn't!" she exclaimed.

"Why not?" His blue eyes hardened. "I didn't care for his implications."

"Wasn't he furious?" she asked worriedly.

"No, oddly enough I think he realized I was serious . . . serious about you, I mean. The question now is whether you feel the same way. Do you, Caroline?"

"You mean . . . you love me?" she asked, in a low voice.

"I told you that last night. Did you think I was rambling?" he asked.

"I — I wasn't sure. Oh, Jake, I don't know what to say."

He turned her face to his, caressing her cheek. "Say 'I love you'." His voice was husky.

It was a moment of such vital decision that it filled her with a kind of terror. For she knew that, in a way, she did love him. Perhaps, in another place, at another time, she could have said, "Yes, I do love you," without any doubt. If only she had not met Ian . . .

"I see," Jake said, after a moment. His hand fell away from her cheek. "Well, God knows I'm not much of a catch. I had no right to ask you really."

"Oh, you know that isn't the reason," she said, with a break in her voice. "Please, Jake, don't ever think that. I couldn't bear you to think that."

"No . . . I know. It's just one of those things. Don't look so miserable, Caroline. I shan't do anything foolish." He managed the ghost of a grin. "How can I go off the rails? I'm not exactly on them, am I?"

"Oh, Jake," her eyes filled with tears, "if only I had realized!"

"It isn't your fault. It's . . . life," he said, with a shrug.

But his face was bleak, and she hated herself for hurting him.

"Well, I think I'll go and get some sleep," he said, after a moment. "I can't snooze down here among the customers. See you around, Caroline."

She nodded, her throat aching.

In the days that followed, Caroline blamed herself bitterly for being so absorbed in the state of her own emotions that she had failed to recognize the transition of Jake's feelings for her. She missed his companionship desperately, and there were moments when she wondered if, in turning him down, she had wilfully, thrown away a chance of happiness which, later, she would regret with all her heart.

One evening, after work, she decided to go sailing. Perhaps, if she could tire herself out, she might have a decent night's sleep, instead of tossing and turning till all hours. She told Eve where she was going, and set out for the boatyard.

When she got there, Mr. Cooper was not about. But

one of his sons ferried her out to the *Mermaid*.

She had been out for about an hour when the wind began to freshen. Caroline had already noticed the cloud formation changing from calm drifts of cumulus to an untidy mackerel pattern. As she was alone, she decided to play safe and put on an inflatable lifejacket.

It was as well she did take this precaution, for very soon it was clear that there was some really rough weather blowing up.

Caroline was about halfway back to the boatyard before she felt any serious alarm. Then, all at once, she realized that there was not another sail in sight. Where, twenty minutes earlier, there had been at least five other dinghies reefing and heading shorewards, there was now only a desolate expanse of churning sea, with lines of white horses showing where the waves were breaking over hidden reefs. And with the sun slipping below the horizon, and the sky becoming more overcast, the light was rapidly failing.

Her greatest danger lay in running aground on a coral bank. In calm or moderate weather, banks were easily discernible. But now, with the water scuffed up by gusts of wind, she could only trust to luck to get her through them.

In the end, it was not a coral bank which brought disaster. Suddenly there was a mighty buffet of wind. Too late she let fly the sheet. The *Mermaid* capsized with Caroline underneath her.

For an instant, she felt the blind frenzy of total panic. The sea seemed to claw at her body, dragging her down. She struggled to the surface, and found herself trapped by sodden canvas.

But once her head was out of water, the momentary terror receded.

"Don't be a fool!" she told herself sharply. "*Mermaid* won't sink like a keel boat. You can't drown if you keep your head."

But righting the *Mermaid* in a squall was very different from a fair-weather exercise. Caroline managed to find the halyards and release them, but rolling the swamped dinghy over was more than she could manage without help. After several exhausting attempts, she knew she would have to wait until someone rescued her. Even if no one had seen her capsize, the Cooper boy was bound to raise an alarm if she did not return to the boatyard before it grew dark. Meanwhile she must just hang on the hull and wait. At least the sea was not cold, as it would have been at home.

Nevertheless, by the time she had been in the water for an hour, it seemed much colder than she had ever known it before. The wind, far from slackening, was stronger than ever. And the twilight was rapidly merging into darkness.

"Not to worry. They can still find me," Caroline thought bracingly. But she knew she could not hold on indefinitely. Her arms were already aching from shoulder to wrist, and she was beginning to feel oddly lightheaded.

When she first heard the throb of an engine, she was terrified she might be imagining it. Then a beam of blinding light swept over the *Mermaid*, and she knew it was no delusion. There was a boat coming. Her ordeal was nearly over.

Judging by the sound of the engine, the boat was a powerful launch. Caroline knew it would not be able to come too close without danger of ramming the *Mermaid*. But she no longer had the strength to swim even a short distance.

It was the Cooper boy who came for her. He tied a

lifeline round her, shouted to whoever was on the launch and swam alongside while she was being hauled in like a spent game fish. Then several strong arms heaved her on board, and someone removed the line and lifejacket, and someone else wrapped her in a blanket and carried her below to a cabin where she was laid on a bunk and made to swallow brandy.

At first, after the darkness, of the sea, the lamplight seemed dazzlingly bright. She lay with closed eyes, shaking with fatigue and nervous reaction.

The hands which had gently wiped her face began to dry her bare feet and chafe them.

"Feeling better?" she was asked.

It was a measure of her devitalized condition that, even when she knew who was looking after her, she felt only a mild curiosity. What was Ian doing aboard? she wondered.

Presently he put the glass to her lips again, and this time the brandy sent tendrils of warmth spreading through her. She had a curious floating sensation.

Ian propped her up and tugged off her soaked white sweater, as if he were undressing a child. Then he pulled the wet blanket away, and wrapped her in another dry one.

After that, everything was hazy. Dimly, she heard the engine starting up, and people moving about on deck and shouting to each other. And then the bunk began to rock gently, and the lamp was a golden glow very far away, and she felt warm and overwhelmingly drowsy. She was still in a pleasant daze when Ian carried her on deck again and put her into the back of a car. But, from then on, the combined effect of physical shock and neat brandy on an empty stomach began to wear off slightly.

Instead of taking her back to the Tropicana, he drove

to a large white building which she took to be the local hospital until they entered the hall of what was clearly a private house.

"Where are we?" she asked bemusedly.

"This is my home." He carried her up a broad curving staircase and along a close-carpeted landing.

There was a coloured woman coming out of one of the rooms. Setting Caroline on her feet, but keeping his arm round her waist, Ian said, "This is Miss Browning, Belle. Her boat capsized in the 'blow'. Get her hair dry, will you, please? I'm going to call Doctor Woolf."

The woman looked startled, but quickly recovered herself.

"Sure, Mister Ian. I'll see to the young lady." She took Caroline from him and led her into a bedroom.

By now, although she was still unsteady on her feet, Caroline's head was clearing rapidly. Nevertheless, she submitted to having her hair well rubbed and combed.

Before Belle had finished doing this, there was a tap at the door and Ian returned. "Here are some night things for you, Caroline. The doctor will be here in fifteen minutes, and I've been through to the hotel. They'll explain what has happened to Miss Arnold, and tell her you're spending the night here."

"Oh, but I can't," she protested weakly. "And I really don't need a doctor. I'm feeling better already."

"Don't be foolish," he told her firmly, and walked out of the room again.

When Belle took away the blanket, Caroline suddenly realized that her cotton shirt was missing. Then she remembered how fuddled she had been on the launch, and knew that Ian must have taken it off with her drenched sweater. Her cheeks grew hot.

Belle helped her to put on a full-length blue silk night-

gown, and a long-sleeved quilted bedjacket, white with sprays of blue flowers. Then she shepherded her into bed arranged a bank of pillows at her back.

"Don't you worry about anything, Miss Browning. Mister Ian knows what's best," she said, with a smile. "Doctor be here soon."

The doctor was a short youngish man with friendly grey eyes and a casual manner.

After Ian had introduced him, he sat down on the side of the bed and said cheerfully, "So you've had a ducking, have you? How do you feel?"

"Only tired – there's really nothing wrong with me."

He took her pulse. "I thought you said she was half drowned, Ian. She seems pretty perk to me."

"She wasn't when we fished her out," Ian said, frowning.

"Any idea how long you were in the water, Miss Browning?" Doctor Woolf enquired.

"I'm not sure. Not much more than half an hour, I shouldn't think."

He stuck a thermometer in her mouth. "Still, not a very pleasant experience, particularly as you were on your own. Good thing you stayed with the boat. Obviously a girl of sense."

In the background, Ian made a sound which suggested he did not agree.

Doctor Woolf gave Caroline a wink. Presently, reading the thermometer, he said, "I don't think there's any damage that a good night's rest won't cure. But I'll pop over in the morning and have another look at you, just to be on the safe side. No, don't bother to see me out, Ian. I know my way. 'Night, Miss Browning."

When he had gone, Ian said, "Are you hungry? Could you manage a light meal?"

"Oh, yes, please, I'm starving. That was why the brandy keeled me over. I haven't eaten since lunch."

"Right: I'll go and ask Belle to fix something." With a look she could not interpret, he left the room.

Caroline leaned back against the mound of soft lace-edged pillows.

I suppose he thinks it was all my own fault. But it could have happened to anyone with the squall blowing up so quickly, she thought, with a sigh. I hope the boat isn't too badly damaged. Well, if it is, I shall just have to pay for it out of my wages.

About ten minutes later, Belle came up with a supper tray.

"Thank you. I'm sorry to be such a nuisance," Caroline said apologetically.

"It ain't no trouble, miss. Anything else you fancy, you ring the bell here."

After she had drunk a cup of clear soup, and eaten some finely-cut chicken sandwiches, Caroline felt much better. Indeed her reflexes were now so nearly back to normal that when she heard an unmistakably masculine tread coming along the landing, she automatically braced herself.

Ian came into the room with a glass of water in his hand. "It might be as well to take a mild sedative," he said, coming close to the bed and putting the glass and a capsule on the table beside her. "Have you had enough to eat?"

"Yes, thank you. I really am very sorry to have put everyone to so much trouble," she said carefully.

"Never mind about that. All that matters is that you don't seem to have come to any great harm," he said repressively. "The wind has died down now. I'll open the windows."

Caroline watched him part the rose silk curtains which screened two tall windows on either side of the dressing-table.

"What I don't understand is how you came to be on the launch," she said.

"I was at Cooper's house, discussing some new sails, when his boy came to give the alarm about you. We thought at first you must have taken shelter in one of the bays."

"I wish I had," she said ruefully. "But I never expected the wind to get up such force in so short a time. The barometer at the boatyard wasn't falling when I checked it before I set out."

"Possibly not, but anyone who lives here would have told you there was a 'blow' coming. Didn't the boy at the yard warn you of it?"

"No, he never said a word."

"Oh, well, I suppose he assumed you could cope with a spot of rough weather."

His tone stung her. "I don't think that's fair," she countered stiffly. "Everyone has an accident occasionally. Even you must have capsized at some time. It happens to the best people."

Ian came back to the bedside, his hands thrust into his pockets, the muscles of his jaw tensed.

"I don't think you realize how near you came to disaster," he said, in a hard, clipped voice. "You were drifting towards a reef. Another ten minutes, and the boat would have smashed to pieces." His dark eyes were narrowed and brilliant. "You're lucky to be alive, my girl."

He looked so fiercely angry that, involuntarily, she shrank from him.

"Well, *Mermaid* isn't *your* boat," she retorted, with a lift of her chin. "And it wasn't really necessary to bring

me here. I daresay the Coopers would have rescued me without you involving yourself."

His hands came out of his pockets, and he bent and gripped her shoulders, making her gasp. He looked as if he could shake her until her teeth rattled. And then, with his fingers biting into her flesh, he jerked her roughly against him and kissed her.

When Caroline woke up the next morning, the dim light made her think it was early dawn. Then she heard the distant purr of a motor-mower, and realized that the rose silk curtains were lined to shut out the sun. When she peered at the little gilt clock on the bedside table, she was horrified to find it was nearly midday.

Jumping out of bed and hurriedly drawing the curtains, she remembered the sleeping pill she had taken.

And the thought of the pill brought back everything else that had happened the night before. She closed her eyes, and her hand went up to her lips.

It was more than twelve hours since Ian had thrust her back against the pillows, so dazed and shaken that when she opened her eyes he was already disappearing through the doorway. But, as if it had happened only moments ago, her mouth seemed to burn from the impact of that one savage kiss.

How long had it lasted? Five seconds? And yet those brief instants in his arms had turned her whole world upside down.

She was on the point of ringing the bell near the bed when she noticed that her shirt and shorts and underwear were on the top of a mahogany tallboy. They had been laundered and carefully ironed.

Caroline dressed and used the silver-rimmed comb on the dressing-table to tidy her salt-sticky hair. Then, bare-

foot – her beach shoes being somewhere on the sea-bed – she ventured out of the room.

There was no one about, and at the head of the staircase she paused a moment to admire the fine proportions of the hall and the graceful curve of the balustrade. Presumably the house had been built by Ian's great-grandfather with the profits from his gun-running exploits. If so, he had been a man of taste as well as courage.

All the way down the side of the staircase, a series of shallow niches in the wall contained alabaster vases filled with roses and wild jasmine and sprays of Cape honeysuckle.

As Caroline reached the hall, someone called "Good morning."

The voice seemed to come from a room across the hall, although there was no one in view through the open door. But as soon as she entered the room, she saw that a woman was lying on a daybed close to the open windows. She had a large embroidery tambour on her lap, and there was a box of coloured silks on the table at her elbow.

Taking off her spectacles, she smiled at Caroline, and said, "I'm Ian's mother. Come and sit down, Miss Browning. I'll ring for coffee. We lunch at one, but I expect you would like something to eat before then. How did you sleep?"

"Very well, thank you. I'm sorry I'm so late in getting up." Caroline perched on the edge of a chair facing the daybed.

"Don't worry about that. It will have done you good. I expect you're wondering how I knew you were in the hall. It was the fourth stair. It always creaks when anyone treads on it. Oh, you haven't any shoes, poor child. What size do you take?"

"Six," Caroline told her.

"So do I. You can borrow a pair of mine. Ah, Belle, bring some coffee and biscuits, will you, please? And would you fetch a pair of my sandals too. Miss Browning is walking about barefoot."

When Ian had mentioned that his mother was an invalid, Caroline had vaguely imagined Mrs. Dryden as a frail elderly white-haired woman with an imperious *grande dame* manner, controlling the household from a sickbed.

But although she was probably fifty, Mrs. Dryden looked barely forty-five. Her hair, far from being white, was as dark as Ian's. If she had any grey hairs at all, they were still few enough to be discreetly touched out.

As if she read Caroline's thought, Mrs. Dryden said, "I expect you're wondering why I'm lying about doing embroidery at this hour of the day. It must seem very lazy. Unfortunately I have what they call a heart condition, so I have to sit about like a poor old thing of ninety. So annoying, because otherwise I'm as fit as a fiddle."

At this point Belle returned with a pair of yellow sandals, and at the same time there came the sound of a car approaching.

"That will be John Woolf. I expect he would like some coffee too, Belle."

Mrs. Dryden put away her tambour, and collected some snippets of thread which had fallen on her lap. She had a youthfully slim figure, and was dressed in white linen trousers and a rose-red shirt. Like Ian, she had a naturally olive skin browned by sitting in the sun, although not his gypsy darkness.

"Morning, Joceline." Doctor Woolf greeted Mrs. Dryden with the easy informality of an old friend.

"And how are you today, Miss Browning? As well as I am, by the look of you."

Caroline smiled and nodded. "I'm sorry I was responsible for your being called out last night," she said contritely.

"Not to worry. It relieved Ian's mind. Anyway, he was quite right to call me."

He stayed about a quarter of an hour. When he had gone, Caroline said, "I must go too, Mrs. Dryden. Heaven knows how they're managing at the salon this morning."

"Oh, you can't go yet," her hostess said quickly. "Ian left the most strict instructions that you were not to be allowed out until he came home. He'll run you back to the hotel after lunch, I expect. He should be home in a few minutes. Let's stroll round the garden, shall we? I am allowed a little mild exercise."

As they walked round the lovely garden, Mrs. Dryden pointed out a creeper entwining a stone archway.

"That is a night-blooming cereus. It blooms for only one night, usually early in August," she explained. "I think it's the most spectacular of all our Bermudian plants. The flowers are simply glorious, but as soon as the sun rises they wither and die."

In other circumstances, Caroline would have been interested in the creeper and, later, written to her father about it.

But at the moment all her thoughts were concentrated on the imminent return of Ian. Fortunately Mrs. Dryden did not seem to notice that her remarks were falling on inattentive ears, and went on naming various unusual plants.

They were returning to the house by way of one of the citrus groves when Caroline saw Ian coming towards

them. Her cheeks began to burn, her pulse to race.

But having kissed his mother's cheek and tucked her arm through his, he acknowledged Caroline as calmly as if what had happened last night in the bedroom had completely slipped his mind.

They had lunch at a round glass table in a sunny garden room at the back of the house. Ian took little part in the conversation, which consisted mainly of Mrs. Dryden asking their guest about her family and her work at the salon, and Caroline answering her questions.

On learning that she had three brothers, Mrs. Dryden said, "Oh, our family is just the opposite. I have three daughters. The two eldest are married now, and Julie, my youngest girl, is working in New York. But when they were all living at home poor Ian was completely outnumbered. His only escape was to go off on a fishing trip. It's a wonder he didn't grow up a fanatical misogynist."

"Some people might say I was," Ian put in coolly, his eyes meeting Caroline's for the first time since they had sat down.

His mother laughed and passed over the remark, but Caroline knew it had been aimed at her, and was uneasily aware of his scrutiny for several minutes after she had dropped her own glance.

While they were having coffee, Belle came to tell Mrs. Dryden she was wanted on the telephone. She had brought a plug-in set with her, but Mrs. Dryden said she would take the call in another room.

"I expect it's Maggie Housman, and she always talks for *hours*," she explained, and excused herself.

Left alone with Ian, Caroline said, "I must be back at the salon before two-thirty. I have an appointment with Mrs. Stuyvesant from the Ocean Suite."

Ian glanced at his watch. "It's barely one forty-five.

There's no rush."

"What happened this morning? Did Eve cancel my appointments?"

"No, she and Miss Gautier managed to cope between them, I believe." He topped up their coffee cups, and lit a cigarette.

There was a pause in which Caroline searched for some safe impersonal remark, but found her mind a blank.

Then, abruptly, Ian said, "About last night — I shouldn't have said what I did to you. You had been through enough already. It wasn't the moment for a diatribe. As for what happened afterwards . . . I can't honestly say I regret that. But I think you must be aware how I feel about you."

"H-how you feel?" she echoed, barely above a whisper.

He pushed back his chair and stood up with a kind of leashed violence. "I imagine I made it fairly obvious the night Macauley was ill." He crushed out his cigarette and swung away from the table. "Perhaps we'd better go now after all."

Slowly she rose to her feet and laid down her napkin. "Yes, if you wish. But, Ian . . . I . . ."

"Well?" he shot at her curtly, his face in profile.

Then something in the quality of her hesitation made him turn his head and look at her again.

A rasp in his voice, he said, "For God's sake, Caroline, don't look at me like that unless —"

And then she was in his arms, crushed against his lean hard body as if he would never let her go.

It was Belle, coming to clear the table, who eventually made them draw apart.

"Oh, excuse me, Mister Ian." She stood with her hand to her mouth, her eyes bright with amusement.

"It's all right, Belle. Carry on." His left arm still round her waist, Ian swept Caroline through the open glass doors and into the garden.

"Where are we going?" she asked breathlessly, as she was propelled in the direction of a shrubbery.

"Somewhere where we can be private," he said, with a laugh in his voice.

Beyond the shrubbery was a summer-house, painted white and half smothered in blue muryanda blossom. Ian led Caroline inside, and drew her down on to a couch there.

A long time later, he said huskily, "What about your family? Will they mind you marrying a Bermudian?"

"Not when they meet you," she murmured, against his shoulder. "Oh, Ian, is this really happening? I thought you didn't even like me."

"My dear girl, you were the one who always shied off," he said dryly. "Every time I appeared on the scene, you visibly froze."

"Well, you were always so horrid to me. And anyway, I thought—"

"Yes?" he prompted, putting her gently away from him.

Caroline hesitated. "I thought there was something between you and Miss Fitzgerald."

"Elaine? Good lord, no! She's not my type at all. Too assertive," he said laconically.

"She's very beautiful and elegant."

He took her face between his hands. "Yes, Elaine is a good-looking girl. But my taste runs to somewhat dishevelled blondes."

"I must look a sight," she said ruefully. "My hair all rats' tails and no make-up. Oh, Ian, my appointment at the salon! I'd forgotten all about it."

"So I should hope," he said teasingly. "Anyway, it's too late to worry about it now. I expect Miss Arnold will have dealt with the situation."

"How can she have done? It's our busiest afternoon. I must go back, Ian. Mrs. Stuyvesant will be furious if she has to go without her treatment."

"She can always complain to the management," he said cheerfully.

"But my other appointments," Caroline began half-heartedly. "I really must go. It's not fair to Eve, and —"

Ian's mouth pressed softly on hers, effectively stifling her protests.

Presently, leaning over her as she lay back against the cushions, he said, "Caroline . . . about Jake Macauley. I think he's in love with you, too, poor devil. He more or less admitted it when I told him to keep away from you."

"Yes, he told me about that," she said, in a troubled tone. "He asked me to marry him, Ian. I feel very badly about it. He's such a nice person, and he's had a rotten life." She saw the slight hardening of his mouth, and said quickly, "Please, don't be angry. You have no reason to be. You do believe that, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe it. But there were times when I wasn't so sure," he admitted wryly. "Even young Colin gave me a couple of bad moments. The night you cut your foot, you behaved as if you couldn't bear me to touch you."

"I was terrified you would guess how I really felt. You have a way of looking at people as if you knew exactly what they were thinking."

She touched his cheek with her fingertips, still finding it slightly incredible that he should be looking at her with such tender amusement instead of that sardonic expression which had always been so unnerving.

He turned his mouth into her palm. "Shall we go and

tell my mother? I expect Belle has already dropped a hint to her."

"Will she be upset?" Caroline asked, as they left the summer-house. "It's all happened so suddenly, and I'm not the sort of girl she must have hoped you would marry."

He gave her a little shake. "Don't be foolish. She'll be delighted."

They found Mrs. Dryden busy with her embroidery. She looked up at her tall son, and her eyes twinkled.

"Do I gather it's all settled?"

He laughed. "How did you know?"

"You look smug, and poor Caroline looks petrified," she said, smiling. "Actually I've guessed this was coming for some time. You've been so shockingly bad-tempered."

"Have I?" he said, looking startled.

"Impossible!" Mrs. Dryden held out her hands to Caroline. "Don't look so nervous, my dear. I know it's an awful moment when one has to face one's prospective mother-in-law, but I'll do my best to be a tolerable one."

"I'd better ring the hotel and placate Miss Arnold," Ian said, leaving them together.

As he went out of the room, Mrs. Dryden moved her legs so that there was room for Caroline to sit on the edge of the daybed.

"I must admit I've been bristling with curiosity," she said. "I've known for some time that Ian was in love. He's been so preoccupied and cross, and normally he's such an even-tempered person. And when I met you this morning, I knew at once that you were the girl. Then Belle came rushing in to say she had seen Ian kissing you, and that you had gone off to the summer-house together. So I guessed what would happen next."

"You don't mind?" Caroline asked diffidently.

"My dear child, why should I? I liked you the moment I saw you. You mustn't think that, because I live with Ian, I'm one of those frightful possessive women who don't want their sons to marry."

"Oh, I'm sure you're not. I only meant that you know so little about me," Caroline explained.

"I can see the only important thing – that you love Ian," his mother said gently. "It's written all over you, Caroline. What about your parents? Have you given them any hint that this might happen?"

"Oh, no – it seemed so impossible. I should think they'll be flabbergasted."

"And worried too, I imagine," Mrs. Dryden said thoughtfully. "It's bound to make them anxious if you write and say you're engaged to a man they've never set eyes on. The trouble is Ian can't leave the hotel for long at this time of year. I wonder . . . could your parents come here? Or have they already taken their holiday?"

"No, they're going to Scotland in August," Caroline told her.

"Perhaps, in the circumstances, they would agree to come to Bermuda instead. As our guests, of course."

"I think that's an excellent idea," said Ian, having returned in time to hear this proposal. Then, to Caroline, "We'd better go back to the hotel now, darling. Miss Arnold seems to be in rather a stew about something, and you'll want to change, I expect. We'll come back for dinner, Mother."

After Ian had dropped her at the cabins, Caroline had a shower and gave her hair a quick dry shampoo before putting on her pale grey crêpe dress.

It was only the second time she had worn it; the first time being when Jake had taken her out to dinner. Think-

ing of him cast a shadow over her happiness. She hoped with all her heart that one day he would find a girl who would love him as he needed to be loved. The salon had already closed when she walked through the hotel foyer to join Ian in his office. Eve was with him, looking so upset that Caroline wondered what could be the matter.

"Eve, I'm sorry I left you in the lurch today. I expect you're furious with me," she said contritely.

Before Eve could speak, Ian said, "I'm afraid something very unpleasant has come up, Caroline. Miss Arnold has discovered who took the money from Mrs. Binyon's bag."

"So it really was stolen," Caroline said, taken aback.

"Unfortunately, yes. Miss Gautier has admitted to it."

"Marie-Laure? Oh, surely not!"

"Mrs. Binyon wasn't the only one to lose money, Caroline," Eve told her. "I missed some myself a couple of weeks back. Only a pound, but I was positive I hadn't mislaid it."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Caroline exclaimed. "Oh, Eve, you didn't think—"

"No, she didn't think you'd taken it," Ian put in quickly. "She didn't tell you because she knew how upset you were the first time it happened, and she didn't want you to be even more distressed."

"You see, I suspected Marie-Laure from the beginning," Eve said unhappily. "I had no reason to do so. It was just an intuition. Anyway, last night I had a row with her about coming in so late, and she suddenly burst into tears and admitted the whole thing."

"But who on earth did she do it?" Caroline said, appalled.

"She seems to be mixed up with a crowd who all have

money to burn, and she felt she had to keep up with them. She's bought *five* new evening dresses since she arrived, and enough jewellery to stock a shop," Eve told her. "I feel terribly to blame," she went on. "I should have realized what was happening and tried to check it."

"I certainly wish you'd told me of your suspicions, Miss Arnold," Ian said gravely. "But you can't hold yourself responsible for the situation. The fault lies in Miss Gautier's weakness of character. A girl of her type should never have been sent here. You couldn't be expected to exert any great control over her social activities."

"What I don't understand is when she took the money," said Caroline.

"Apparently she went into your treatment room to borrow an eyeliner which was missing from her own kit. Mrs. Binyon was asleep after her massage, and she saw the money in the bag and took it on a crazy impulse," Eve said flatly. "She swears she changed her mind and intended to replace it. But by then you were back in the room."

"Nevertheless she didn't come forward when she learned later on that Caroline had been accused," Ian said coldly.

"What will happen to her?" Caroline asked. "Will it all have to come out? If it does, it could ruin her whole life. Oh, Eve, can't you give her another chance? I'm sure she'll never steal again. She must have been going through hell to admit she did it."

"I don't know what to decide," Eve said worriedly. "She did do it twice, Caroline, and she did let the blame hang over you. Even so I don't like the idea of her being

dismissed without a reference. But what alternative is there? We can't just overlook it. What do you think, Mr. Dryden?"

Before he could reply, Caroline said impulsively, "Oh, please, don't insist on it being reported, Ian. Don't let it spoil today – not today of all days."

His stern look softened a little. "Very well," he said, after a pause. "If you're agreeable, Miss Arnold, I will have a word with Miss Gautier myself. I may as well deal with her now." He smiled suddenly. "In the meantime, Caroline will explain why I'm in a more lenient mood than usual. Why don't you both have tea on the terrace? I'll join you after I've finished with Miss Gautier."

Later that night, after Mrs. Dryden had gone to bed, Ian and Caroline walked in the moonlit garden. The night was very still, scarcely a breath of wind stirring the drooping fronds of the palm trees. Across the silvery expanse of the Harrington Sound a beach fire was burning, and the dark hillside was scattered with the lights from guest-houses and holiday cottages.

"I want to show you something," Ian said quietly, and he led her down a narrow path which wound through a wild part of the garden where Caroline had not been before.

"I didn't know you had a moongate," she said, in surprise, as she saw the round gateway ahead of them.

"Rather a special moongate. This is where my grandfather proposed to my grandmother. I don't remember him. He died before I was born. But my grandmother used to tell us about him when we were children. He was thirty-five when they met, and she was eighteen and the prettiest girl in the colony. Apparently he was a pretty

tough character, more at home on the waterfront than in drawing-rooms. She fell in love with him the first time she saw him, but he always seemed embarrassed and ill at ease with her. And then one day he got his sister to invite her to tea, and he took her for a walk in the garden and showed her this."

Ian flicked on his cigarette lighter and held it close to the old stone wall, and Caroline saw that there was some writing on it.

"He had this carved by a man who did inscriptions on tombstones," Ian explained. "Can you make it out?"

As he moved the lighter slowly along the lines of writing, Caroline leaned forward and read them out.

*"There is a path on the sea's azure floor,
No keel has ever ploughed that path before;
The halcyons brood around the foamless isles;
The treacherous ocean has forsworn its wiles;
The merry mariners are bold and free:
Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?"*

Underneath, engraved in smaller lettering, were the names *Thomas Dryden* and *Charlotte Butler* and the date *May 1899*.

"What a lovely story," Caroline said softly. "Of course she said 'yes'. He must have been very romantic under the surface. Who wrote those lines? Do you know?"

"Shelley, I believe." Ian extinguished his lighter and moved closer to her. "Do you remember what I told you about moongates?"

"I remember very well." Smiling, she stepped into the centre of the pool of moonlight. He followed, his arms enclosing her. "Last time you didn't seem to care for our

old customs," he said, with laughter in his voice.

Caroline smiled and slid her arms round his neck. "I do now," she murmured, before he kissed her.